



**PHD**

**The process of Transnationalization of Drug Trafficking Organisations: The case of the Mexican Cartels**

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**The process of Transnationalization of Drug Trafficking Organisations:  
The case of the Mexican Cartels**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath

Department of Politics, Languages and International Studies

September, 2019

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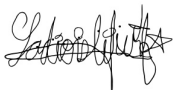
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## Abstract

This thesis seeks to develop a better understanding of the transnational behaviour of drug trafficking organisations (DTOs) by documenting the role that Mexican DTOs had in the cocaine trafficking to Europe after 2008. This was the year when the Italian authorities announced their discoveries that there were business interaction between the Mexican DTOs and the Italian mafia groups. At the same time the Italian authorities were announcing their findings, my literature review showed a lack of analysis and documentation regarding the transnationalization of Mexican DTOs to Europe.

While most of the literature focuses on the explanation of the cartels inside Mexico, my research question focused on clarifying whether or not the Mexican DTOs are expanding their cocaine trafficking activities to Europe. At this point I considered the reports of the Italian authorities that affirm that the Mexican DTOs are relevant drug trafficking intermediaries in the cocaine trafficking routes to Europe.

To answer my research question, and to systematically describe the evolution of DTOs, a qualitative methods approach was deployed (Mohajan, 2018) with a case study design adapted from Yin (2003). My analysis was carried out through the use of multiple triangulation techniques that helped me to collect and study different types of data to understand the subject. I collected empirical information through 28 interviews with security personnel with experience in countering Mexican DTOs or in the cocaine routes to Europe. The information gathered from the security personnel, complemented by official reports and open source information, was useful to answer my research question and test my hypothesis.

The analysis showed that despite Italian authorities' claims and perceptions, the power of the Mexican cartels is very limited when talking about their presence and links in Europe, and resulted in four key findings. Firstly, that the perception of the Mexican DTOs as having trans-Atlantic powers is erroneous, because the evidence showed that there is no transatlantic expansion. Secondly, the analysis uncovered the internal, national and international variables that were observed to alter the evolution and behaviour of the Mexican DTOs. At the internal level, the variables included the loss of leadership and the grievances between groups. At the national level the identified variables were the democratic transitions, corruption and impunity networks. And at the international level the variables were the international drug demand, the changes in the international illicit world, the situation of governance and corruption in foreign countries and the geography of the region where the illicit business are taking place.

The third finding was that the transatlantic cocaine trafficking routes are not controlled by an specific actor, but they are horizontal structures that are highly adaptative. The final key finding refers to a methodological observation which I describe as the "paradox of referencing"; when many sources reference something that was true in the past –like the links between Mexican DTOs and Italian mafia discovered in 2008– they help to perpetuate the present perception of a past phenomenon.



## **Dedication**

I am especially thankful, to all members of the security community who work every day of the year, regardless of the holidays, to make our countries a safer place. I am grateful for my colleagues and my superiors, their dedication inspired me every step of the way.

My special appreciation to all the security practitioners who were willing to share their experiences during the interviews.

My enormous gratitude and acknowledgment to all the security practitioners in the world who left us while they were fighting for the rule of law, and whose interesting stories will never be known.

This thesis is my way to honour you all.

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I am grateful to my parents, for not pushing their little girl to be a "good woman". I will be eternally thankful that they encouraged me to become whomever I wanted to be in life, regardless of our circumstances. I am also grateful to Yuyo, who was always cheering for me, and who always remembered where I was and what was I up to.

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<b>Table of Contents</b>	
<b>Dedication.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Acknowledgments.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>List of Figures .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>List of Tables.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Glossary of terms.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>12</b>
1.1 Relevance of this research .....	13
1.2 Research Aims .....	14
1.3 Structure of this study.....	14
1.4 Research questions .....	14
1.5 Literature Review.....	15
Mexican DTOs history and evolution in Mexico .....	15
Literature about the continental expansion of the Mexican DTOs in the Americas. ....	23
Literature about the transnationalization of Mexican DTOs to Europe through cocaine trafficking. ....	27
1.6 Hypothesis .....	33
<b>Chapter 2 Methodology .....</b>	<b>35</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	35
2.2 My chosen methodology: A qualitative method approach with case study .....	35
Defining the parts of the case study .....	37
Selection of the units of analysis.....	40
2.3 Data collection and analysis.....	41
Primary sources.....	44
Secondary sources .....	51
Data analysis .....	52
2.4 Limitations of study.....	54
2.5 Strengths of this research .....	56
<b>Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework .....</b>	<b>58</b>
3.1 Historical Institutionalism. ....	58
3.2 Institutionalism in International Relations: International Liberalism .....	65
3.3 The combination of Historical Institutionalism and Institutionalism in International Relations to observe the DTOs.....	71
<b>Chapter 4 Mexican cartels and their evolution 1980s-2000s.....</b>	<b>73</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	73
4.2 Origins, evolution and characteristics of the Mexican cartels. ....	74
4.3 The father of chaos: The Guadalajara Cartel .....	74
Origins of the Organisation .....	74
Activities .....	75
Leadership.....	75
Evolution of the organisation's corruptive capacities.....	76
The demise of the Guadalajara cartel. ....	78
The Guadalajara aftermath: the evolution of the multi-cartel system.....	81
4.4 The Sinaloa Cartel.....	83
Origins of the Organisation .....	83
Activities .....	83
Leadership.....	84
Corruption Network.....	85
Evolution of the Sinaloa Cartel and the Federation.....	86
Inter cartel conflicts between the Sinaloa cartel and its peers. ....	86
Conclusion.....	89
4.5 The Gulf Cartel.....	89
Origins .....	89
Leadership.....	89
Cartel Activities .....	90

Corruption Network .....	91
Evolution of the Gulf cartel.....	92
Conclusion.....	95
4.6 The Zetas.....	95
Origin .....	95
Leadership .....	96
Activities.....	97
Corruption Network .....	97
Evolution of the Zetas .....	97
Conclusion.....	100
4.7 Applying the multiple triangulation approach and assembling the puzzle .....	101
4.8 Mexican security institutions and counter narcotic policies .....	104
Involvement of the military .....	106
Involvement of the Federal Direction of Security and the Justice System .....	108
Mexican counter narcotic policies strategies 2000-2018.....	110
4.9 The role of violence and impunity .....	117
4.10 Conclusion.....	120
Chapter 5 Proximate regional variables that affected the cartels' behaviour.....	122
5.1 Introduction .....	122
5.2 The regional variables.....	122
The reduction of the Heroin flow from Europe.....	122
The situation in Colombia and the cocaine flow .....	123
The pacification of Central America and the intrusion of the Mexican DTOs .....	125
Cocaine Consumption in the U.S. ....	127
5.3 Assembling the Puzzle and applying the theoretical approach .....	129
5.4 Conclusions .....	137
Chapter 6 The evolution of cocaine trafficking to Europe.....	139
6.1 Introduction .....	139
6.2 European regional circumstances during the 1990s and 2000s. ....	141
6.3 The increase of cocaine demand in Europe .....	141
6.4 The evolution of the cocaine supply chain to Europe. ....	143
6.5 The counter cocaine efforts in Europe .....	147
The role of Africa in the cocaine flow to Europe.....	148
The emerging role of Brazil as a transshipment point .....	152
Multiple triangulation analysis .....	153
6.6 SME's observations about the Mexican expansion in the cocaine routes to Europe..	155
6.7 Official documents that claimed the expansion of the Mexican DTOs to Europe. ....	157
6.8 Observations about the perceptions of the Mexican DTOs' role in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. ....	162
6.9 Analysis of the independent variables triangulating them with the empirical information. ....	166
6.10 Conclusion.....	168
Chapter 7 Concluding remarks about the independent variables that are shaping the transnationalization of Mexican DTOs.....	170
7.1 Introduction .....	170
7.2 The powerful Mexican cartels, perception versus reality.....	172
7.3 Internal variables .....	174
7.4 National variables.....	174
7.5 International variables.....	175
7.6 The Mexican DTOs' expansion to Europe: a mere illusion .....	176
7.7 Dark, adaptive and horizontal: the new cocaine trafficking network.....	177
7.8 The paradox of referencing.....	179
7.9 Weaknesses observed during my research .....	180
7.10 Final thoughts .....	181
Bibliography .....	183

<b>Appendixes .....</b>	<b>232</b>
<b>Appendix 1: General questionnaire.....</b>	<b>232</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Consent form and information sheet.....</b>	<b>233</b>
<b>Appendix 3 Homicides in Mexico January 1990- September 2016.....</b>	<b>236</b>
<b>Appendix 4 Operation Solare.....</b>	<b>237</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1 Yin's models of case study .....	38
Figure 2 Embedded Transnational Case Study with multi-regional contexts .....	39
Figure 3 Puzzle approach, a visual adaptation of multiple triangulation .....	53
Figure 4 The Mexican states and the cartel's headquarters.....	74
Figure 5 The Puzzle Approach applied to the Camarena Case .....	79
Figure 6 Leadership and Loyalty in the Gulf Cartel.....	94
Figure 7 Cartel territorial influence in Mexican territory between 2009 and 2012.....	98
Figure 8 Behaviour of the DTOs in the illicit system .....	103
Figure 9 Political systems in Mexico and the difference on criminal control.....	105
Figure 10 Military Zones in Mexico (RM for the name in Spanish).....	106
Figure 11 Homicides in Mexico per state per month from 1990-2016 .....	118
Figure 12 Puzzle of factors to understand the transnational behaviour of the Mexican cartels during 1980s and 1990s. ....	131
Figure 13 Puzzle of factors to understand the transnational behaviour of the Mexican cartels during the 2000s.....	132
Figure 14 Drug trafficking of cocaine to the U.S. during the 1980s.....	133
Figure 15 Drug trafficking of cocaine to the U.S. during the 1990s.....	133
Figure 16 Drug trafficking of cocaine to the U.S. during the 2000s.....	134
Figure 17 Drug consumption in Spain and the U.K. ....	141
Figure 18 Historical exchange rates EUR-GBP .....	142
Figure 19 Historical exchange rates USD-GBP .....	142
Figure 20 Cocaine consumption in the U.K. ....	143
Figure 21 Evolution of cocaine interdiction in the eight countries with more seizures overtime.....	147
Figure 22 Individual seizures linked to cocaine trafficking in Africa, 2005-2008 .....	149
Figure 23 Drug trafficking of cocaine to Europe during the 1990s and mid 2000s.....	154
Figure 24 Drug trafficking of cocaine to Europe during mid 2000s and 2010s.....	154
Figure 25 Factors that alter the behaviour of the DTOs.....	173
Figure 26 Map of operations carried out during Project Reckoning in the U.S.....	237

**List of Tables**

Table 1 Data Sources..... 43

Table 2 Specific Data Type and Sources..... 44

Table 3 Interviewees..... 46

Table 4 Cocaine consumption in the US ..... 128

## **Glossary of terms**

- CISEN: in Spanish, Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional- Center of Investigations and National Security
- CNS: in Spanish, Consejo Nacional de Seguridad- National Security Council
- CTOC, PP. Countering Transnational Organised Crime
- DCSA: in Italian, Direzione Centrale para il Servizio Antidroga- Central Direction for the Anti-drug Service
- DEA: Drug Enforcement Administration
- DIA: in Italian, Direzione Investigativa Antimafia- Investigative Antimafia Directorate
- DNA: in Italian, Direzione Nazionale Antimafia- National Antimafia Directorate
- DOJ: U.S. Department of Justice
- DTOs: Drug Trafficking Organizations
- EMCDDA: European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction
- EU: European Union
- EUROPOL: European Police
- INTERPOL: International Police
- LEA: Law Enforcement Agencies
- OCGs Organised Criminal Groups
- SEDENA: in Spanish, Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional-Secretary of National Defense
- SEGOB: in Spanish, Secretaría de Gobernación-Secretary of Government
- SEMAR: in Spanish, Secretaría de la Marina-Secretary of the Navy
- SME: Subject Matter Expert
- SSP: in Spanish, Secretaría de Seguridad Pública- Secretary of Public Security
- TOC: Transnational Organised Crime
- UNODC: United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime
- U.S.: United States
- NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations
- IGOS: International Governmental Organizations
- SOCA: Serious Organised Crime Agency
- PAN: in Spanish, Partido de Acción Nacional- National Action Party
- PRI: in Spanish, Partido Revolucionario Institucional- Institutional Revolution Party
- PRD: in Spanish, Partido de la Revolución Democrática- Democratic Revolution Party
- PGR: in Spanish, Procuraduría General de la República- General Attorney of the Republic
- GAO: Government Accountability Office
- SAMHSA: Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services
- INEGI: in Spanish, Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía- National Institute of Statistics and Geography
- NCA: National Crime Agency



## Chapter 1 Introduction

The evolution and empowerment of Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) has been something that jeopardizes the national security of Mexico and of the countries in the Latin American region. Every year, the Mexican cartels play a significant role in cocaine trafficking through the region (Isacson, 2017). In this sense, the expansion of the criminal activities of Mexican DTOs in Latin America (Arratia, 2016) is strengthening the criminal and violent power of Mexican DTOs in Mexico.

This trafficking business gives the cartels enough revenue to finance structures of corruption and impunity within the Mexican government (CRS, 2019). In addition, this business finances the flow of illicit weapons. The trafficked arms are used by the cartels in their different conflicts against each other and against law enforcement agencies and military forces in Mexico as well as in several other countries in Central America. (Boggs and Rand, 2015; GAO, 2016; Pastor, 2017, p.13). Following these dynamics, it has been documented that Mexican DTOs have been expanding into Central America (Aferrez, 2019). While increasing their regional grip, they have been perceived as playing a primary role in the cocaine trafficking into Europe (DNA, 2016, p.298; Bargent, 2013).

This thesis focuses on documenting and understanding the allegedly increased transnationalization of the activities that the Mexican cartels have had in the cocaine routes into Europe. It hypothesizes that the observations about phenomenon had been influenced by two independent variables. On the one hand, the perception that the Mexican DTOs have a strong role in the cocaine trafficking to Europe was influenced by the counter narcotic policies implemented in Mexico after the 2006. On the other hand, it was influenced by the empowered role that the Mexican DTOs have in the Latin American cocaine routes to the United States.

The idea for this thesis came from my years as a national security analyst in Mexico. I felt frustrated that the Mexican war on drugs seemed to be a never-ending story where the cartels were forever strong. In 2013, I read a public report from EUROPOL (2013a) that called attention to the efforts that the Mexican DTOs were working towards developing “wholesale cocaine distribution business” in Europe. Assuming that the news was true, the possibility that Mexican DTOs managed to establish long lasting networks in Europe was a grand threat to the national security of Mexico.

This research began with the purpose of documenting and understanding the growing importance of the Mexican cartels in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. In order to do so, I developed an embedded case study with a qualitative approach. I studied the three most important Mexican DTOs, which were observed to have an increasing role in the cocaine trafficking to Europe according to European authorities (EUROPOL 2013 and DNA 2015). These cartels were the Sinaloa cartel, the Gulf cartel and the Zetas.

At the point when I began this research in 2015, there was too much academic attention on what the cartels were doing inside Mexico and Latin America. However, I did not find, apart from one author (Rodriguez, 2009) who documented the increase in the role

of the Mexican DTOs in the cocaine routes to Europe. In this regard, my process of data collection resulted to be challenging due to the violent profile of the cartels in Mexico. For this reason, I used multiple triangulation of data collection and analysis. Triangulation helped me cope with the impossibility of collecting empirical information directly from the cartels. What is more, it allowed me to use multiple sources of data and triangulate the information to explain or disprove the increasing power of Mexican DTOs in cocaine trafficking to Europe.

This thesis is developed within the discipline of International Relations. In terms of the theoretical framework, I applied a combination of Historical Institutionalism (Ikenberry, 1988; Hall and Taylor, 1996; and Rixen and Viola, 2016) and Internationalism in International Relations (following the work of Keohane, 1984; Keohane and Nye, 1977; Nye, 2007; and Rousseau and Walker, 2009). The use of Historical Institutionalism allowed a better understanding and analysis of the Mexican DTOs. The main reason is that it includes the re-construction of the historical evolution of the units of analysis (the cartels), observing past critical junctures and events that played a role in shaping the present outcome of the phenomena being studied. With the application of International Institutionalism, I observed the Mexican DTOs as an actor in the international arena; this made it possible to create a further analysis about their involvement on the cocaine routes to Europe.

### **1.1 Relevance of this research**

The main reason and motivation for carrying out this research was to assess the degree of expansion of the Mexican DTOs' role in the cocaine routes into Europe. The relevance of this research relates to furthering our understanding of the international behaviour of Mexican DTOs. An assessment of the role that the Mexican DTOs play in the cocaine routes into Europe would help explain the overall strength and criminal power that the Mexican DTOs have not only in Mexico but also abroad.

My interest in the Mexican DTOs comes from the disruptive role that these criminal groups have had in the stability of Mexico's public and national security. In the past 13 years, more than 150,000 people had been killed or disappeared during the fight against the DTOs (CRS, 2019, p.3). If the Mexican cartels were indeed solid players in the routes of cocaine into Europe as was claimed by the DNA (2016, p.298), this could imply that their illicit revenues would increase. More revenue would translate into more corruptive and firearm power inside Mexico, provoking a new rise in the number homicides and crime-related violence that has grown continuously since 2006. In other words, the more commercial power of the cartels in the international arena, the more resources they would get for their illicit activities and for violence inside Mexico. In turn, this empowerment reduces the capacities of the state to cope with the situation.

In addition, my thesis builds on the knowledge of those authors who studied the role of Mexican DTOs in Latin America (e.g. Palacios and Serrano, 2010; Bagley and Horwitz, 2007) to observe the role that the Mexican DTOs have in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. I constructed an explanation that shows not only the background of the cartels but the direct

and indirect circumstances that shaped their development at the national and international level, which clarifies the possibilities that the DTOs are expanding to Europe.

## **1.2 Research Aims**

My first and main aim of this research project was to assess the degree of expansion and power that the Mexican cartels have over the trafficking routes of cocaine to Europe. This objective was developed based on information from the Italian National Antimafia Directorate (DNA, 2016) and the European Police (EUROPOL; 2013a), that I read prior to beginning this research. These documents raised the awareness about the increasing role of Mexican DTOs in the drug routes from the Americas to Europe. Hence, my objective was to confirm and document such expansion to increase our understanding about the activities of Mexican DTOs in Europe.

My secondary aim was to identify the independent variables that affect the transnationalization of the Mexican cartels. This process was based on the observation of the cartels' backgrounds and their historical evolution. In this regard, by paying attention to the historic evolution of Mexican DTOs it is possible to identify major events that have altered their behaviour in the international level.

In addition my last aim was to understand the perception that the cartels had a powerful transatlantic power. At this point, I considered that the perception of the role that the Mexican DTOs are playing in the cocaine trafficking to Europe could be based on external events non-related to Europe.

## **1.3 Structure of this study**

My thesis is composed of eight chapters. The first chapter presents the introduction to my research, including the literature review. The second chapter explains my chosen methodology, Qualitative Methods approach and my research design, an embedded case study. The third chapter e the theoretical framework about Historical Institutionalism and Institutionalism in International Relations. The fourth chapter analyses the evolution of the Mexican DTOs and their surrounding circumstances in Mexico. The fifth chapter examines the independent variables that affected the international expansion of the Mexican DTOs in the Americas. The sixth chapter analyses the cocaine routes to Europe and presents the empirical information about the role played by the Mexican cartels. Finally, the seventh chapter presents the main findings and the conclusions of my thesis.

## **1.4 Research questions**

The main research question is based on the EUROPOL publication (2013 a) and the DNA report (DNA, 2016) about the increasing role of the Mexican DTOs in the cocaine trafficking routes to Europe. Both documents concluded that the Mexican cartels were *increasing* their role as traffickers in the cocaine routes to Europe. These claims, about the

increased role of Mexican DTOs in the cocaine routes to Europe, lead me to my main research question:

**"Are the Mexican cartels expanding their influence in the cocaine trafficking to Europe as perceived by some EUROPOL and the Italian authorities?"**

My main objective throughout this research was to verify and document the real role that could had the Mexican cartels in the cocaine routes to Europe during the 2000s. However, before being able to answer this research question, I carried out a review of the existing literature to understand what had already been analysed and reported on Mexican drug trafficking organisations.

### **1.5 Literature Review**

The literature on Mexican DTOs is very extensive. The present research aims to observe the increasing importance that the Mexican cartels are having in the cocaine trafficking routes into Europe. For this reason, the first part of my literature review was based on identifying the publications focusing on Mexican DTOs' history and their evolution in Mexico. This part had the intention to identify the different approaches used to study the DTOs at the national level. The second part reviews the literature that analysed the Latin American expansion of the Mexican DTOs. This review had the objective to understand and observe the identified causes that led to the internationalization of Mexican DTOs to other parts of the Americas. The third part of the literature review examines the publications about the Mexican DTOs and their roles in the cocaine trafficking into Europe. This part is significant because, while the participation of the Mexican DTOs in the cocaine routes from South America to the US is vastly documented, my review of the literature showed that there is a lack of academic literature about the participation of Mexican DTO in Europe.

#### **Mexican DTOs history and evolution in Mexico**

Research on the drug trafficking problem in Mexico and the Mexican DTOs showed two main, but different approaches. Some literature focused on explaining the political evolution of the country and its impact on the development of the drug trafficking organisations. Other paid specific attention to the evolution of DTOs and how this dynamic affected the development of crime and violence in Mexico. In this respect, I noticed that in general, the academic publications about the Mexican DTOs cartel pays special attention to the historic evolution of the trafficking problem.

#### **Political evolution and the development of the drug trafficking organisations.**

This type of research tries to understand the change of drug trafficking on the continent, or in a certain country, through the evolution of policies and political development of the time. For example, Klinger and Moreno (2014), narrate the history of drug trafficking and the policies implemented by Mexico and the United States to argue that the conflict represents a window of opportunity to strengthen the official relations between

Mexico and the United States. Likewise, Chabat (2010a, p.8) describes how the Merida Initiative -a cooperation tool between the U.S. and Mexico- has improved bilateral relations because it "represents a historic change in the patterns of counter narcotics cooperation between Mexico and the United States". Furthering the analysis, Santamaría (2016) explains the effects of this cooperation tool against organised crime not only in Mexico but also in the Central American Region and the Caribbean.

In a more specific way, some scholars pay special attention to the Merida Initiative as one of the largest joint efforts against the Mexican DTOs. Some of them recognise the historical relevance and structure of the Initiative (Benítez, R., 2007; Olson, E., and Wilson, C., 2010; Gonzalez, J. 2012; Hendrix, S., 2008; Rico, C., 2008; Abu-Hamdeh, S., 2011.); its analytical perspectives, including its positive and negative implications (WOLA, 2008; Velázquez, R., and Prado, J., 2009; Wolf, S. and Morayta, G. 2011; Ribando-Seelke, C. and Finklea, K., 2016.); and the distribution and appropriation of the budget (Ribando-Seelke, C., 2009;). Apart from their specific focus, these publications have in common an approach in which the increase in cooperation is: 1) a result of better international relations between countries to fight DTOs and 2) a joint answer to a common problem.

Antagonistically, authors such as Ortega and Gómez (2010) and Peláez, R (2010) understand this increased relationship between the United States and the Latin American countries, and the subsequent cooperation tools, as a way of new American interventionism. They explain how the drug trafficking problem is used by the United States to increase its influence on the Latin American countries who cannot fight drug cartels on their own. The perception of the Merida Initiative as a manner of American interventionism could be based on the historical perspective of the role that the U.S. had in combating the expansion of communist governments in Latin America. At this point, the motives behind the Merida Initiative are irrelevant for this research because the objective is to understand how it plays a role in the development and behaviour of drug trafficking organisations at a regional and international level.

Moving away from understanding the problem through international cooperation tools, there is an extensive collection of literature that explains the problem of Mexican DTOs and drug trafficking through the historical development of national and international policies and institutional weaknesses. The basic argument for the spread of the phenomena is related to governmental weakness and corruption practices in the different levels and institutions of the Mexican government (Barruecos, S and Philip, G., 2012; Astorga, L., 2015 and 1999a; Norzagaray, D., 2010). These authors observe the causal relation between governmental corruption and the empowerment of drug trafficking organisations.

In this regard, Serrano (2007, p. 254) observes that the evolution of DTOs is influenced not only by the corruption structures in the government, but also by the implementation of security policies. She mentions that the prohibition of substances in the United States during the 1920s was a main factor for the evolution of DTOs in Mexico. Her argument was that the strategies used to enforce the prohibition created the structures of drug trafficking that we have today; it was during the 1920s when the Mexican government,

pressured by the U.S. government, banned the production and commercialization of opium poppies and marihuana.

However, at the time of such laws the Mexican state did not have the capacity to enforce counter narcotic strategies. As explained by Serrano, the Mexican state did not have the institutional capacities to control and administrate the Mexican territory (2007, 258-259). Hence, the prohibition lead to the creation of criminal organizations and structures of corruption that evolved as the Mexican state became more stable.

Serrano observes the historical evolution of the counternarcotic policies in the U.S. and Mexico. In particular she noted that in the 1970s, the U.S. significantly increased its counter narcotic efforts, and pressured Mexico to do the same. At the same time, the demand for drugs in the United States was on the rise, which meant that the opportunity costs of drug trafficking benefited the traffickers. In these circumstances the new counter narcotic policies caused an increase in the DTOs needs for protection regulation and market administration (2007, p.267). These observations make it clear that the Mexican DTOs are organic structures. Such organizations take advantage of observed opportunities to expand their business, and at the same time react to governmental policies. The attention to the historic causal relation between security policies and the evolution of organised crime in Mexico helps to explain the adapting and thriving capacities showed by the Mexican DTOs.

Furthermore, Serrano's historical analysis shows how the Mexican DTOs were transnational since the beginning. Their main aim was the trafficking of illicit substances to the United States across the U.S.-Mexican border; and their evolution was linked to the drug demand on the one hand and to the counter narcotic polices on the other hand. Following this publication, Serrano worked with Palacios to widen the understanding of variables that affect the evolution of drug trafficking in the region (Palacios and Serrano, 2010). The authors created a comparative analysis using the cases of Mexico and Colombia. Their research included the observation of the differences in the political systems of both countries, their level of fragmentation and their economic liberalisation. The relevance of this publication is related to the consideration of multiple exogenous variables to understand the evolution of the DTOs.

The authors argue that the model of centralised governmental authority from 1947-1985 in Mexico prevented the rise of drug-related violence. (Palacios and Serrano, 2010, p. 106). At the same time, they analysed the economic process of drugs, by explaining that the rise of the drug market can be understood as an economy of "primary exports." This means that drugs as market products are similar to gold and emeralds and share market similarities: 1) high market value and low weight makes them perfect as contraband; 2) a supply chain that is coordinated along regions; 3) the difference in prices between the production costs to the final market value. (2010, p. 108). In summary, they explain the complexity of the problem by pointing out political, economic and market factors that enabled narco-trafficking in the region before developing inter-cartel dynamics. This last piece of literature is useful to understand, not only the differences addressed by the authors, but as a model to identify differences between Mexico and the countries in Central America and Africa.

Apart from Serrano, other Mexican authors with extensive experience on the matter are Luis Astorga, Jorge Chabat, and Raul Benitez Manaut. Due to their knowledge and quantity of publications about narcotraffick in Mexico, I consider these three authors to be the most influential scholars in the field. They are commonly quoted in other publications, without any kind of rejection against their arguments. The three of them present similar perspectives that explain the evolution of drug trafficking in Mexico as linked with the evolution of the Mexican political scenario and the corruption of its politicians.

In the case of Luis Astorga, one of his most recent publications (2015) explains the different factors and circumstances that were already taking place at the beginning of President Calderón's administration (2006-2012). He argues that the violence shown by the cartels since 2006 was the culmination of a process rather than a reaction against Calderón's policies. Through this optic, he argues that the failures of the security policies can be attributed to the institutional weaknesses and the lack of coordination between the different levels of government. Although he does not justify Calderón's security policies, he does not criticise them either. He explains them as a response to a previously complex political scenario in which Calderón had had little influence. This book is an objective narrative of the independent circumstances faced by Calderón as a president, taking into consideration previous historical developments that shaped the drug trafficking organisations.

In earlier publications, Astorga (1999a and 1999b) describes the main events that affected the historical development of the drug smuggling phenomena in Mexico. In particular, he observed the links between institutional weakness and the evolution of DTOs. In a later publication, he explains the relationship between security, the military and the traffickers (Astorga, 2007), and elucidates how DTOs pose a constant threat over time (Astorga, 2012). Moreover, in 2016 the re-edition of his 1996 book is an exceptional piece of literature because twenty years later it proves that his explanations of the relationship between crime and politics and the perception of drugs are still accurate (Astorga, 2016).

Similar to Astorga, Jorge Chabat (2010b) explains how the policies of Calderón were a response to a pre-existent chaotic scenario of crime in the country. His contribution is that he assesses the entangled dynamics of corruption, weak local governance, and the evolution of drug trafficking organisations. Moreover, in a previous publication (Chabat, 2002, p.1), he argues that the role of Mexico as transshipment country, and its vicinity to the largest cocaine consumer in the world, reduces the manoeuvring possibilities of the Mexican government in its counter narcotic strategies. Chabat's ideas are similar to the arguments presented by Serrano (2007) who explained the dependency between the Mexican counter narcotic policies and the U.S. diplomatic pressure.

Furthermore, Chabat 2002 explains the complexity of the trafficking problem. His analysis observes that the dynamics between the cartels in terms of violence and turf wars, in addition to the relation between the cartels and the state apparatus. His conclusions observe the need for harder security policies years before Calderón was elected president. Following this line, Chabat (2010b and 2010c) assessed Calderón's security strategy as a reaction to the problem, and elaborated on (2010d) the threat posed by transnational organised crime and the limitation of the national responses to a transnational problem.

Another part of Chabat's research is focused on Mexican-U.S. relations. He (Chabat, 1994) describes the historical influence that the U.S. has had in the development of the Mexican counter narcotics strategies by the end of the 20th century. In a later publication (Chabat, 2010a), he analyses the bilateral counter narcotic efforts through the Merida Initiative. His understanding of the complexities in the Mexico-U.S. international relations acknowledges the leading role that the U.S. has in fighting transitional organised crime in the region. Chabat's acknowledgement of this role is particularly useful for this research to understand the way the cooperation tools had impacted the fight against drug trafficking.

As for the study of the history of the DTO's, Benítez Manaut et al. (2009) focuses on narrating the transformation of these organisations in Mexico. In his subsequent publication (Manaut, 2010) he develops the topic of the evolution of the Mexico-U.S. bilateral responses to the security threat posed by drug trafficking and its causal relation with the internationalization of Mexican DTOs. His main argument was that the policies implemented during Calderon's government created additional pressure on the cartels. To counter the governmental strategies, the cartels increased their power and presence in Central American countries. However, this casual explanation has not been used to assess the expansion of the DTOs outside the Americas. Just as Astorga and Chabat, the extensive expertise of Benitez on Latin American history and drug dynamics allows him to see the influence of innumerable different variables that affect the evolving process of drug trafficking organisations.

All three authors make transversal interdisciplinary analyses about the evolution of Mexican political history, democracy, and the rise of the drug trafficking organisations in Mexico. As stated before, these three authors are the most experienced academics in the field, and they are frequently quoted when explaining the evolution of drug trafficking in Mexico. Together, their publications could be considered the A-B-C's for understanding the evolution of Mexican drug cartels. Moreover, their work will be used in this research to understand the degree of influence that counter narcotic policies, along with institutional weakness had had on the growth of DTOs.

In the same line the work, Bruce Bagley and John Bailey demonstrate equal experience in researching Mexican DTOs as Astorga or Chabat. Bailey (1988) creates a deep explanation about the centralization of Mexican politics and the great power of the only ruling party in all levels of politics. This allows a better understanding for the creation of the structures of corruption and impunity that allowed the evolution and empowerment of Mexican DTOs.

Following this consideration of history, Bailey and Godson (2000) co-edited a book explaining the relation between democratic governability in Mexico and the development of organised crime. This publication analyses the democratic transition occurring in Mexico during the 1980s and the 1990s, and how it affected the evolution of the DTOs. The consideration towards the Mexican democratic transition and the increasing plurality of political parties at the local and the municipal level is considered a relevant exogenous factor that influences the historic strengthening of the criminal power of Mexican DTOs.



In addition, the relevance of this book, apart from its content, is that it includes contributions from Astorga and Benitez, which shows the existence of an international community of experts in DTOs, and which gives international validation to the expertise of the Mexican authors. Following this, in 2002 Bailey worked with Chabat as co-editor of a book about the transnational crime problem as a bilateral challenge for Mexico and the U.S.. Bailey and Chabat (2002) identified the constant evolution of the Mexican DTOs, and in particular, they recognize the increasing challenge that it represents in terms of security and counter narcotic policies for both, Mexico and the U.S.

Bailey (2014) explains the relations between the political class and the development of narcotraffick as well as the growing power of the DTOs. He identifies corruption and impunity as two main characteristics observed in the Mexican government. Furthermore, he analyses the importance that corruption and impunity had had in the empowerment of the Mexican cartels. A remarkable aspect is that he presents examples of the power that the criminal organisations had already acquired by the beginning of the War on Drugs.

The analysis of the security policies and the evolution of DTOs has attracted great attention from the academic community. Many authors (for example, Berruecos and Phillip, 2012; Pereyra, 2012; and Williams, 2010) have studied the responses of the Mexican government and the evolution of organised crime and violence inside Mexico, with special attention on the developments of the Mexican strategies implemented between 2006 and 2012. A detailed historical analysis is presented by Norzagaray (2010), who analyses the problem from the governmental perspective in accordance with the different presidential administrations. Similarly, Morales (2011) presents an assessment of the evolution of the drug trafficking problem in Mexico before presenting his critiques to the Mexican counter narcotics strategies.

Another example is Guillermo Valdés Castellanos, ex-director of the Mexican Center of Information and National Security (CISEN), which was Mexico's civilian intelligence agency. His book (2013) presents evidence of state weakness as an enabler for the strengthening process of DTOs. In addition, he presents cases about the past relations between the Mexican political elite -state governors and politicians- and the leading drug trafficking organisations in the country. The work of Valdés Castellanos aids to understand why counter narcotic policies, even when meticulously planned, may fail at the moment of their application; a strategic policy, may fail if the people who will apply it at the local level allows impunity and corruption to prevail.

In a similar argument, Herrera-Lasso (2014) explains that one of the deficiencies of Calderón's policies was that he fought illegality without creating the bases for stability. The novelty of his text relates to the inversion of the research question, instead of answering how to combat insecurity, he focused in studying the conditions that generate security. Herrera-Lasso studies the role that poverty, impunity, corruption in law enforcement, the culture of illegality and the power of illicit organizations, have in the evolution of social instability and violence. This represents a broader analysis of crime and the behaviour that criminal structures have in Mexico.

Azaola (2013) shares the idea that the implementation of security policies only contributed to the increase the violence in Mexico. Azaola's approach also includes the consideration of non-criminal related violence and the deterioration of security institutions as main factors that contribute to the phenomena in Mexico. These considerations are similar to those presented by Herrera-Lasso; the consideration of the weakening of security institutions goes hand in hand with the rise of the impunity that allows the cartels to increase their power both in Mexico and abroad.

The consideration of multiple variables is seen similarly in the work of Bataillon (2015). He links the evolution of democracy and the political elite as a relevant factor that contributes to strengthening the illicit systems in Mexico. At the same time, he identifies the economic and commercial developments of Mexico, as exogenous factors that, in an indirect way, influenced the drug trafficking system that supplied the U.S. By observing economic variables as well as democratic processes, Bataillon (2015) and Herrera-Lasso (2014) show the relation between the evolution of organised crime in Mexico and independent variables like the lack of economic development and the decentralization of the federal government.

Instead of focusing on the security policies, the authors aforementioned (Bataillon, 2015; Herrera-Lasso, 2014; and Azaola, 2013) explore with special attention the social, economic and political conditions that contributed to the development of the problem. This approach is useful because it observes how the historical background and interrelation of multiple variables can be useful to explain the current situation of the DTOs in Mexico. In addition, the identification of historical events makes it possible to comprehend the relation between specific incidents and the expansion of Mexican DTOs.

The observation of the relation between democratization and the evolution of crime activities and violence in Mexico is presented in Dell's (2015) in-depth analysis. The author created a model of correlation between higher levels of violence in Mexico on the one hand, and the political parties elected for the municipal governments on the other hand. According to her findings, the levels of violence were higher in those municipalities where the ruling political party was President Calderón's Party of National Action (PAN is the Spanish acronym). She states that the reason for this is because the implementation of security policies in PAN ruled municipalities was done with less resistance than in those ruled by opposition parties, generating major impacts and responses from criminal organisations. (Dell, 2015, p.1752).

Even though Dell's research proves the existence of a relationship between security policies and violence, she does not take into consideration the impact of global variables or circumstances in violence the way Mejía, Castillo and Restrepo (2014) do by relating national policies in Colombia and their effect on the national situation in Mexico. Nevertheless, Dell introduces a new variable no one has considered before: the impact of elections and the resistance/commitment of municipal governments to the application of the law. Looking at it differently, it could imply that in states where violence has increased, there was a better implementation policy, and those municipalities with opposition parties

that did not show increased levels of violence may not have implemented the security policies or may have been corrupted.

Additionally, Mejía, Castillo and Restrepo (2014) and Dell (2015) restate the arguments presented by Escalante (2011) and Merino (2011) about the relationship between the empowerment of the Mexican DTOs in Mexico, the rise of violence and the implementation of the newest security strategies. Following these same arguments, Aureliani (2016) explores the growing power of Mexican DTOs inside Mexico. He elaborates on how the power of the cartel has evolved and how the civil society is trapped between the strategies of the government and the activities and retaliation of the cartels.

### **Literature that focus on DTO History**

Apart from studying institutional weakness and political decisions that had created the insecurity in Mexico, some authors focus on explaining the illicit organisations and their evolution (for example: historical developments, alliances, betrayals, acts of revenge, etcetera.) in Mexico. This focus is centred on observing the criminal evolution and growth of the DTOs rather than their interactions with the Mexican political system and its institutional weaknesses. Some scholars create what could be considered historiographies of the Mexican DTOs. Due to the details in its studies, I divided the literature in two groups.

The first one refers to those that create an assessment of cartel dynamics. This group takes into consideration more general factors including the moves and countermoves between DTOs behaviour and security strategies. The second group are those authors that create detailed explanations of the cartels, their behaviour and evolution. This last kind of research has become very difficult to undertake due to the high number of daily events in the War on Drugs and the danger of knowing too much. Moreover, the violent profile of the current drug cartels in Mexico makes it a hazardous activity because in the past years Mexican DTOs have been hunting, torturing and killing news reporters that dare to publish about them.

On this topic, one of the best contributions is done by Bagley (2011) because it details the historical development of the cartels in Mexico. Further literature on specific cartels can be observed in Deibert, M., (2014) Grayson, G. (2010 and 2014), and DHS (2010). Other authors focused on inter-cartel violence (Chabat, 2012), and their effect on governability (González, D. 2013). Some publications centre their attention on the role of the drug lords and their influence in drug trafficking (Resa, 2002; Hernandez, 2010; and Esquivel, J. 2013), as well as in the specific role of the cartels at the Mexican-U.S. Border (Bunker, J., 2011).

The main characteristics of this type of literature are that they explain the drug trafficking problem taking into consideration the individual characteristics of each DTO. They analyse the dynamics within the group and its relations with other DTOs. This approach will be useful at the moment of understanding the process of expansion of these groups. An example of the need to integrate the inter-cartel dynamics in narcotraffick studies is the story of the Los Zetas cartel. This group became independent due to internal

conflicts with their former bosses in the Gulf Cartel, and not because of governmental intervention. After they split, they started a violent war against their former bosses. It is comprehensible that part of the overall violence in Mexico is also related to the conflicts between cartels and not only to the governmental strategies. This literature was helpful during the analysis of the inter-cartel relations and the dynamics of drug-violence in México.

The second category is represented by Langton (2013) and his book "Gangland: The rise of the Mexican Cartels from El Paso to Vancouver". This book explains the historical origins and evolution of the Mexican Drug Cartels. Moreover, for the period 2006-2012, Langton presents a unique and detailed explanation with specific examples of violent actions and reactions of the drug trafficking organisations in a month by month basis, showing a micro-level documentation of what that rise of violence" means.

In addition to this, the author also creates a historical explanation of the development of drug trafficking in Mexico that begins in the Aztecs. The first chapters explain the consolidation of Mexico as a country, including the cultural foundations of the nation, a factor that very few authors take into consideration to explain drug trafficking. These represents another gap in the literature: the influence/power of culture on the development of drug trafficking organisations, or to be more precise, to what extent had the "cartels" became part of Mexican culture, or to what extent the Mexican culture around violence permits the continuation of its existence.

### **Literature about the continental expansion of the Mexican DTOs in the Americas.**

This section presents the publications that focus on the continental expansion of the DTOs beyond Mexico. The criminal expansion of the Mexican DTOs in terms of drug trafficking activities is primarily linked to the smuggling of cocaine from South America into the United States. In this regards, Zepeda, R and Rosen, J. (2014) present an analysis about the transnationalization of criminal groups in the Americas and its relation to the counter counter narcotics efforts implemented in the different countries of the continent.

Another example that links the policies in Colombia with the international evolution of Mexican DTOs is presented by Mejía and Restrepo (2012). The authors created a "model of the war against illegal drugs in producer and consumer countries that accounts for strategic interaction among the actors involved in this war" (2012, p.230). Their quantitative efforts explain how policies implemented in one country alter the strengthening of DTOs in another country. By developing different equations Mejía and Restrepo explain transnational drug conflict dynamics including variables such as price variation, revenue, and the opportunity cost of trafficking.

What is more, their approach includes economic modelling about drug trafficking supply and demand, and the prevention and treatment policies. By considering the later mentioned variables, Mejía and Restrepo argue that the problem of transnational drug trafficking and DTOs in the Americas is an international problem with many variables. In other words, the evolution of the DTOs and their international activities are affected by events and developments taking place outside their home country. At this point, the consideration of the demand and the supply is relevant because it allows to observe magnitude of the incentives that lead the regional actions of DTOs like the Mexican cartels.

In a similar way, Bagley (2011 and 2012) analyses the effects of counter narcotics policies in the evolution of DTOs by observing the cases of Colombia and Mexico. He observes that both cases had been generating the diversification of routes and the spread of drug trafficking organisations into different territories outside their home countries. By observing the evolution of DTOs in both Mexico and Colombia, Bagley corroborates that national counter narcotic policies alter DTO behaviour in terms of the evolution of their transnational activities.

What is more, Bagley (2011) creates a historical analysis of the evolution of cocaine trafficking in the Americas. The relevance of this publication relates to the identification of historical events that lead to the participation of Mexican DTOs in the cocaine trafficking routes to the U.S. One of the main events was the severe counter narcotic strategies implemented in Colombia during the 1990s. These weakened the Colombian DTOs and allowed a greater participation of Mexican DTOs in cocaine trafficking. Hence, independent events in Colombia's drug trafficking dynamics had the capacity to affect the evolution of the transnationalization of the Mexican DTOs.

Following this publication, Bagley and Rosend (2015) edited an interdisciplinary assessment of the problem of drug trafficking, crime and violence in the Americas. The book presents case studies about different countries in Latin America, including Mexico, Colombia and the Central American Region; it analyses the effects that the U.S. national and international counter narcotic policies has had in the evolution of the criminal structures in the region at the beginning of the XXI century.

More specifically, the Bagley (in Bagley and Rosend, 2015, p. 1-26), identifies eight key trends observed in the evolution of drug trafficking phenomena in the Americas during the 2000s:

1. The increasing globalization in drug consumption.
2. The limited results of counter narcotic strategies in the Andean region and their untended side effects.
3. The spread of cultivation areas and drug trafficking routes.
4. The disintegration and dispersion of DTOs and trafficking networks at the national and regional level in Latin American.
5. The limitations related to institutional and governmental weaknesses some countries.
6. The failure of regional and national security policies.
7. A continued inefficiency in reducing the U.S. demand.
8. The increasing support in harm reduction and alternative policies.

Bagley presents how these eight points interact nationally and at the international level in the Americas. Furthermore, he observes the causal relations between the counter narcotic strategies implemented in Colombia and the rise of the Mexican DTOs as transnational

actors. In this term, he clarifies that there is enough evidence that Mexican DTOs are expanding to Central American countries like Guatemala and Honduras.

In relation to the expansion of DTOs to Central America countries, authors like Benitez (Benítez, 1989; Benítez and Cordoba, 1989, and Benítez 1993) presents outstanding knowledge on the subject. His analysis of the historic circumstances in the Central American countries allows him to identify specific independent events and variables that allowed the expansion of the Mexican DTOs. Furthermore, his extensive experience in the region gives him a comprehensive understanding of how and why the problem of drug trafficking in Central America occurred. This is of vital importance to comprehending the expansion of Mexican DTOs in Central America. In his work, he argues how exogenous factors, the vulnerability of Central American governments inherited by different civil conflicts, and the lack of human development, were circumstances that facilitated the intrusion of Mexican DTOs in countries like Guatemala and Honduras.

In this respect, Serrano and Toro (2005) observe that the process of expansion of the Mexican DTOs to Central America is also related to the linkages between the prohibition, the demand and the supply chain of the drugs. In this regard, the authors (2005, p. 238-239) explain that when there are counter narcotic policies that affect the operative costs of illicit trafficking, the trafficking groups will change their operational territories and their methods of trafficking. This argument has proven valid in the case of the Mexican cartels and their behaviour towards other countries in the region after the beginning of the “war on drugs” in Mexico during 2006.

The regional effects of the counter narcotic strategies implemented after the beginning of the Mexico’s “war on drugs” had been widely analysed by Arratia (2016, p. 163). He identifies the counter narcotic strategies implemented during President Calderon’s Administration (2006-2012) as the main catalyst for the expansion of Mexican DTOs to Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. What is more, he identifies different variables that contributed to the transnational expansion of the Mexican DTOs to Central America. Variables such as the geographic location of Mexico and Central American countries between Colombia as the main cocaine producer and the U.S. as the main consumer; along with the institutional weakness of the countries in the region are identified as main factors that allow the Central American expansion of the Mexican DTOs.

In a similar fashion, Villegas (2014) and Pastor (2017) observe the advantages that Mexican DTOs have had in the evolution of the regional narcotraffic geopolitical scenario. The geographical location of Mexico as the southern neighbour to the U.S., was one of the biggest for the empowerment of the Mexican DTOs who helped traffic the drug coming from the southern part of the continent. In addition, Pastor (2017, p.5) and Villegas (2014, p. 249) agree that the counter narcotic strategies implemented in Colombia during the 1990s had the side effect of allowing the empowering of the Mexican DTOs as regional cocaine traffickers. Furthermore, just like Arratia (2016), Pastor (2017) and Villegas (2014) sustain that when president Calderon began to implement stronger counter narcotic strategies in

Mexico after 2006, the Mexican DTOs seek safe haven, moving their part of their illicit operations to Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

An in-depth analysis about the role of the Mexican DTOs in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras is presented by Ten (2012). According to her explanations, the Sinaloa cartel and the Zetas cartel are the DTOs that had continued power in the Central American countries; they purchase cocaine directly from the Colombian producers and administrate the trafficking routes through Central America to Mexico.

According to Ten (2012, p.7-8), the Mexican organizations are in charge of purchasing the drugs directly from the producers in Colombia and administrating the routes through Central America. The author narrates that the initial incursion of the Mexican Zetas was because they were hired by a Guatemalan group (the Mendozas) to attack another Guatemala group (the Leon). Furthermore, the Sinaloa cartel, the Zetas cartel and in a reduced role the Gulf cartel are recognized to have a relevant role in the drug trafficking activities happening in of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador (Ten, 2012 and Mazzitelli, 2011). Their expansion was relatively easy due to their economic power, drug trafficking experience and hierarchical structure.

In this regard, the Sinaloa cartel expanded into Guatemala through alliances with local drug traffickers and the creation of economic and development opportunities for the local population (Ten, 2012). In contraposition, the Zetas are ferocious and impose their will through the use of force and violence. In Honduras, the Sinaloa cartel established a network of speedboats to transport cocaine from Colombia through the shores of Honduras (Ten, 2012, p.9). This documentation of the role of Mexican DTOs presents the difference in transnationalization strategies used by the Sinaloa and the Zetas cartels.

Parallel publications (Mesa, 2009; Espach et al, 2011; and Mazzitelli, 2011) present analogous analysis about the expansion of the Mexican DTOs. These analyses explain the relation between the unstable situation in Central America, the prevalence of governmental corruption and impunity, and the expansion of Mexican DTOs. In this regard, Mazzitelli (2011, p. 8) presents images of the use of speedboats through Central America to smuggle cocaine from Colombia to the Mexican southern border. This allows one to observe that the transshipment of cocaine packages is a network of shipments rather than a single straight line across Central America.

In an in-depth study, Espach et al. (2011) present their findings about the expansion of Mexican DTOs into Guatemala. The authors present case studies of the communities in Guatemala's border with Mexico to observe the criminal actors and explain the role of the Mexican DTOs. Espach et al. (2011, p. 10-12) explain that 2008 represents a braking point for the trafficking dynamics in Guatemala. Before that year, the Mexican DTOs administrated cocaine trafficking, and they established had commercial relations with local traffickers with little violent outbreaks. However, after 2008 this system was replaced by one in which the Mexican cartels, particularly the Zetas, look to control Guatemalan territories and became much more aggressive against local criminal groups.

Other examples of specific observations of Mexican DTO transnationalization towards the Andean Region are presented by Figueira (2012), OEA (2013) and Cubides (2014). During the past 20 years Mexican Sinaloa, Gulf and Zetas cartels expanded to control coca production in Peru. In this move, the Mexican DTOs would have a direct control over the production of coca leaves, increasing their overall power in the cocaine trafficking market. García and Antezana (2009) explain that the Mexicans took over coca production in Peru when the Colombians retreated by the end of the 1990s. However, García and Antezana also consider that in the 2010s the Brazilian DTOs would increasing their grip in the Peruvian coca production and trafficking.

In conclusion, the literature that observes the expansion of Mexican DTOs in the Americas helps to identify some variables that play a role in the transnational expansion of the cartels. The first one refers to that presented by Bagley (in Bagley and Rosend, 2015), Mazzitelli (2011) Serrano and Toro (2005). These authors observed how the Mexican DTOs react to the circumstantial opportunities presented by the effects of civil conflict, governmental instability and underdevelopment in Central America. At the same time the authors presented how independent counter narcotic policies implemented in Colombia affected the regional drug trafficking scenario allowing the Mexicans to strengthen their transnational role. The relevance of such observations is that it shows how the transnational expansion of DTOs is related to what happens in the international sphere and is not constrained only to the events taking place inside Mexico.

### **Literature about the transnationalization of Mexican DTOs to Europe through cocaine trafficking.**

The literature about the expansion of the Mexican DTOs to Europe is quite small when compared to that about the Mexican expansion to Central America. In a general perspective, Bagley (in Bagley and Rosend, 2015, p. 1-26) notes that the globalization of drug consumption has kept the incentives for Latin American drug trafficking organizations. The relevance is that since the 2000s, the consumption of cocaine in the European Union had increased considerably. Paraphrasing Bagley's words (2015, p.2), the regular cocaine consumption of the European Union is more than 4.7 million users, which almost match the 5 million users in the U.S. This implies large incentives for cocaine trafficking groups in Latin America.

Similarly, the work of Gratiús (2012) draws attention to the cocaine trafficking to Europe. This document explains the drug trafficking phenomena coming from Latin America. The contribution is that it takes into consideration Colombia's and Mexico's history of strategies against the DTOs and the evolution of these countries' criminal groups. It also makes notice of the shift in coca production within the Andean region, which alters the dynamics of the whole cocaine market. However, neither Bagley's nor Gratiús' explanations elaborate on the evolution of the role that the Mexicans cartels may have on the cocaine trafficking to Europe.

In 2012 a publication from Diaz de Mera (2012) became one of the first documents to clarify the role that the Mexicans were considered to have in the cocaine trafficking to the European Union. In his document (2012, p.4-5), he presents different activities carried



out by the Mexican DTOs in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. Firstly, he observes the possibility that the Mexican DTOs had established a route to Liverpool, UK. Secondly, he explains that the Sinaloa and the Zetas cartel are using Venezuela to traffic the drug to Europe, where Spain is considered to be the main port of entry. Thirdly, he states that the Mexican DTOs have ties with the Italian mafia groups. And fourthly, he references the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) to say that the Mexican DTOs have also established relations with African DTOs as an expansion of their trafficking networks to Europe.

In this regard, his publication (Diaz de Mera, 2012) is one of the few publications that considers the Mexican DTOs as having multiple partners and activities in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. Another example that mentions the Mexicans DTOs is the work of Wigell and Romero (2013) who presents an analysis of the shipping routes of illicit substances. It explains the changes in cocaine drug trafficking to Europe, as well as the effect that the evolution of the War on Drugs in Latin America has had in the cocaine trafficking dynamics. Wigell and Romero acknowledge that the wars on drugs had generated the expansion of DTOs, of the routes and of the production of cocaine at the international level. In this sense, they make a small mention about the Mexican DTOs, saying that these groups “have joined forces with Italian and Spanish criminal organizations to distribute cocaine and cannabis throughout Europe” (Wigell and Romero, 2013; p.3) However, the authors do not present any evidence to validate their claims, nor any explanation about the international partnership with the criminal groups in Europe.

At this point, the work of Figueira (2012), presents a more detailed examination the role of the Mexican DTOs in the transatlantic cocaine routes. His book uses newspaper articles and official reports to document and analyse the international expansion of the Mexican DTOs in the cocaine routes through the Caribbean Basin to Africa. Figueira made a remarkable compilation of news articles that claim the expansion of Mexican DTOs to Europe.

Through his documentation and analysis Figueira (2012) makes notice of how the many articles exaggerate the role and relevance that the Mexican DTOs have in the cocaine routes to Europe. One of his examples is the case is the arrest Jesus Gutierrez Guzman (supposed cousin of drug lord Joaquín Guzmán). According to the news, the arrest of Gutierrez was evidence that the Sinaloa cartel was seriously trying to expand their organization to Spain; however, as analysed by Figueira (2012, pos. 1367), this was an overreaction of the media and the Spanish police.

Figueira (2012, pos. 1265) also presents the case of the alliance of the Mexican DTOs with the Italian Mafia. The author analyses the articles that claim that the cartels were moving cocaine to Italy through the United States in 2008. He mentions that a route to Europe through the U.S. is underestimating the power of the Mexican Cartels, who are controlling Peruvian crops and are sending cocaine straight from South America. Furthermore, he affirms that the Mexican DTOs and the Italian Mafia have partnerships for the drug trafficking going through the Caribbean Basin.

Other similar works by Figueira include his analysis about the transnational strategy of the Mexica DTOs based on the case of the cocaine trafficking to Sweden (Figueira, 2017).

According to him, the Mexican DTOs are creating a network in which they are attempting to become the main players in the global drug trafficking dynamics. In particular, the Mexicans play a main role in the cocaine trafficking to Europe through the routes that go from South America through Brazil and then through West African countries. In this sense, Figueira mentions the alliance that Mexican DTOs have with European criminal groups, like the Italian Mafia from Calabria as part of the strategic advantage for illicit drug trafficking.

In this respect, the only author that makes serious research about the Mexican cartels in Italy is Mexican Cynthia Rodriguez (2009). She researched the case of the relation between the Mexican cartels and the Italian mafias following the 2008 operation called “Operation Solare”. Her research explains such operation, presenting evidence of the criminal investigation that showed the links that the criminal groups in Mexico and Italy had at the time.

Rodriguez’s (2009) research was too young in time to confirm the long-lasting involvement of the Mexican cartels in Italy after “Operation Solare.” Her work remains as a referent when talking about the influence of the Mexican cartels in Italy. Corrado and Realacci, (2014) quote Rodriguez (2009) as part of their explanation of the expansion of the cartels to Italy; they argue that two operations that showed the involvement of the Mexican drug traffickers with Italian mafia groups (Solare 1 in 2008 and Solare 2 in 2011) are proof that the Mexican cartels are expanding their influence to Italy. However, they do not consider the possibility that the relation between the Italian mafia groups and the Mexican cartels may be part of a wider network and not an expansive attempt of the Mexican cartels.

Another interesting study was carried out by Petralia (2016) whose dissertation focused on the Mexican DTOs and the counter narcotic legislations and strategies in the U.S. and Italy. The relevance of this dissertation is that it dedicates a section to the connection between the Mexican cartels and the Italian mafias. In his explanation, he refers to joint counter narcotic operations between Italy, the U.S. and Mexico, as valid evidence that the Mexican cartels are working in partnership with the Calabrian mafia (the ‘Ndrangheta). This explanation of the connection with the Ndrangheta was useful for guiding my open-ended interviews.

Similarly, the work of Loreto (2017) studies the globalization of Mexican DTOs, including a consideration for their expansion to Europe. He follows a methodology similar to that used by Figueira (2012) who recreated the historical evolution of DTO internationalization by compiling and presenting reports and newspaper articles. However, Loreto (2017) does not present a deep analysis of the reliability of the sources. By doing this, Loreto does not consider that in some cases, as noted by Figueira (2012), the news articles can both overestimate and underestimate the real power of the cartels.

In terms of non-academic literature, the civil association Libera (2012) explains the Mexican DTOs' power in Europe. Libera explains that these groups had formed a partnership with the Italian mafia group known as ‘Ndrangheta. To sustain this claim, they refer to previous joint operations carried out by the law enforcement agencies of the Italian government. In this regard, I collected the reports of the Italian agencies that mentioned the

Mexican DTOs to understand the affirmations made by Libera (2012) about the transnational expansion of the Mexican cartels.

Italian institutions, such as the National Antimafia Directorate (DNA for its name in Italian), the Antimafia Investigative Directorate (DIA) and the Central Directorate for the Anti-drug Service (DCSA) publish individual annual reports detailing their activities as well as the observed drug trafficking and drug consumption trends, from their statistics. These documents are of vital importance for this thesis because the Italian authorities repeatedly reported the presence of specific Mexican DTOs in Europe, and/or their collaboration with the Italian mafia groups. In this sense, I reviewed the different reports of the DCSA, the DNA and the DIA published until 2015 to gather information about the expansion of Mexican DTOs in the specific case of Italy.

The National Antimafia Directorate is constantly assessing the state of the different Mafia groups in Italy. Hence, they observe any interaction between mafia groups and other criminal organizations such as the Mexican DTOs. The relation between Italian mafia and the Mexican DTOs is presented in several reports of the DNA, the DCSA and the DIA. Some of these reports (DNA, 2008, p.719; DNA 2010, p.941; DNA 2013, p. 418; and DNA, 2014, pp.165-166; DCSAb, 2008, p.65; DCSA, 2011a, p.12; DCSAa, 2012, p.177; and DIA 2009a, p.87) mentioned a counter narcotic operation named “Operation Solare” carried out in 2008 as the evidence that the Mexican Gulf cartel was trafficking cocaine to Italy through a route via New York. This is also presented as the evidence that the Mexican cartels had established links with the Italian mafia based in Calabria.

Nevertheless, DNA report for the year 2012 (2012, p.134) states that ‘Operation Solare’ was a proof of the relation between the Italian mafia and the Mexican Zetas. This was a different version from the previous reports aforementioned, that related that Operation Solare to the Gulf cartel. This is contrary not only to the DNA reports, but also to the investigation made by Rodriguez (2009) that presented empirical evidence linking the case with the Gulf cartel. Furthermore, an odd observation is that the next DNA report in 2013 (DNA 2013, p. 418) mentions the Gulf cartel as the one linked to the “Operation Solare” without any clarification of the mention of the Zetas in the previous year.

In a similar example, the DNA reports for the years 2012 (p.133-134), 2013 (p.166) and 2014 (23-24) present the case of the Operation “Crimene 3” of 2011 as evidence that the Zetas were expanding their operations to Europe through a collaboration with the Italian mafia groups. However, the DCSA portrays a different version of “Crimene 3”. The reports for the years 2011 (DCSAa, 2011, p. 12) and 2012 (DCSA, 2012, p.178) note that the Operation “Crimene 3” linked the Calabrian mafia to the South American DTOs, particularly from Venezuela and Colombia, with no mention of the Mexican Zetas in this relation. This dissimilarity makes it unclear whether the investigation “Crimene 3” is evidence that Mexican Zetas had links with the Calabrian mafia or not.

At the same time, another contradiction is observed in the perception of the role that Mexican DTOs play as cocaine traffickers to Europe. In 2013, the DCSA stated that the Mexican DTOs had a dominant position in the supply markets of cocaine, not only in the North American market, but also to half of Europe (2013, p. 9). This importance gained by

the Mexicans also mentioned by the later reports of the DIA (2015.2, p.100) and the DNA 2015 report that states that the Mexicans are primary actors in the cocaine trafficking to Europe (2016, p. 298). However, in 2015 the DCSA report mentioned that Mexican DTOs were not very active in Europe (2015, p.13-15). Furthermore, the same report (DCSA 2015, p.27). explains that the Sinaloa, the Gulf, and the Zetas cartels are in process of fragmentation due to the Mexican counter narcotic policies.

By observing the official reports presented by the Italian authorities it can be said that it is not clear whether the Mexican DTOs have obtained a relevant role in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. This situation questions the statements made in the publications by Libera (2012) or Petralia (2016) that use the Operation Solare or Operation Crimene 3 as the main evidence to sustain the veracity of the transatlantic expansion of the Mexican cartels. At this point, there is a gap in the knowledge of whether the Mexican DTOs have a real relevant role in the cocaine trafficking, or whether it is a perception that has lasted over time based in operations like 2008 Operation Solare.

In this regard, the reports of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) present information about drug markets and drug consumption, explaining that the main problem around cocaine is the increase in its use. These documents are a unique source to understand the state of the art of European investigations on the groups that smuggle cocaine inside the continent. Particularly the report of 2013 (EMCDDA and EUROPOL, 2013, p.47) mentions the significant involvement of the Mexican DTOs in drug trafficking but clarifies the need for further assessment.

At this point, the literature about the increasing relevance of the Mexican DTOs in the cocaine trafficking routes is not conclusive. On the one hand, there are two operations that claimed that the Mexicans were involved somehow in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. However, it is not clear if the current claims that the Mexicans have a prominent role in transatlantic cocaine trafficking, or if such power is a misconception generated by the constant referencing of a limited number of counter narcotic operations that involved the participation of Mexican nationals.

### **General review of the publications about the cocaine trafficking to Europe.**

While making the literature review and trying to find publications that focused on the role of the Mexican DTOs in Europe, I found some publications that developed the subject of cocaine trafficking to Europe but did not mention the Mexican cartels as to have any relevance whatsoever. The next section presents those publications that present solid assessments about the cocaine routes to Europe but without any mention of the Mexican DTOs. The purpose of this section is to present how, while some authors perceive the Mexican DTOs as main players of the routes, other authors make no consideration of the Mexican cartels at all.

For example, the literature review by Levi et al. (2005) presents a revision of the existing literature about "upper level drugs" mainly heroin and cocaine. The review's objective was "to describe criminal organisations active in upper level drug trafficking; to

construct a useful typology of them; to comment on changes over time; and to understand impacts of specific types of intervention on specific types of drug trafficking organisation" (2005, pp. iv) It gathered together literature review carried on in different languages such as Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish. However, there is no mention of the expanding role that the Mexican DTOs could have had at the time.

A similar example is the publication by Brombacher and Mainhold (2009), who assess the cocaine drug trafficking to Europe. They explain the different routes, points of entry and modus operandi of cocaine trafficking, and how the strategies of eradication are precarious because of the improvement on cultivation methods (2009, p.27). This article also suggests different strategies to tackle a) the cultivation coca and production of cocaine in producer countries; 2) the international control of the offer curve through interdiction in trafficking countries and the consumer countries. However, it does not mention that the Mexican DTOs, even when the Operation Solare took place the year before as explained by Rodriguez (2009).

On a more specific case study, the article by McSweeney, Turnbull and Hough (2008), assesses the degree of understanding and research on counter narcotic strategies and drug distribution in the UK. It also includes the structure and organisation of the market, the role of ethnicity in trafficking structure, the strategies taken by national and regional agencies, the trafficking routes from Latin America into the United Kingdom, explaining that Spain and the Netherlands are the main points of entry for the cocaine.

The report concludes that there is a gap in the knowledge and understanding of drug trafficking and drug-related issues. Quoting the text, it expresses further need to:

- "Conceptualise, describe and map more accurately the nature and extent of local, regional and national market structures;
- Establish the long-term effectiveness, cost-effectiveness and value for money offered by the range of interventions aimed at tackling drug markets and distribution networks;
- Develop more multidisciplinary models and approaches (e.g. drawing on economic, criminological, behavioural, psychological and ethnographic perspectives) to better understand different aspects of drug markets, distribution and trafficking networks; and
- Explore further the potential for new policy insights, ideas and interventions (e.g. engaging local communities and increasing their resilience to drug markets; developing strategies which address the extent of violence and intimidation in some local communities and tackle other constraints on their capacity for action; or assessing the impact of technological advances that could shape how markets and distribution networks operate or influence emerging patterns of drug production and consumption, such as the hydroponic cultivation of cannabis).

- Develop our understanding of the extent to which drug trafficking networks are embedded within, or related to, licit business organisations.” (McSweeney, Turnbull, and Hough, 2008, pp.13-14)

### **Conclusions on the Literature review**

In conclusion, the first part of this literature review presented the publications and authors that specialise in the evolution and international expansion of the Mexican DTOs. In this regard, the authors include an analysis of the historical evolution of the DTOs and the counter narcotic policies in Mexico. The second part reviewed the literature that explains the expansion of the Mexican DTOs in the countries of Central and South America. In this regard, the presence of the Mexican cartels in Guatemala, Honduras and el Salvador is something that has been documented during the past decade. The third part examined the literature that talks about the Mexican role in the cocaine routes to Europe. At this point, it was observed that some publications perceive the Mexican DTOs as having an increasing role the European drug trafficking dynamics. However, in contrast to the Mexican expansion to Central America, this alleged expansion to Europe has not been thoroughly documented.

### **1.6 Hypothesis**

The main gap in the knowledge that I observed was that there is no clear knowledge about whether the Mexican DTOs are relevant in the cocaine trafficking to Europe or not. While there are reports that the Mexican DTOs are involved in trafficking to Europe, there are others that do not mention their involvement at all. In addition, the knowledge about the evolution of the cocaine routes to Europe is vague in terms of the specific actors and the progression of inter-criminal relations. In other words, while the history of Mexican DTOs and their involvement in cocaine trafficking from South America to the U.S. has been deeply documented, the same cannot be said about their role in cocaine smuggling to Europe.

Considering the vast literature that explains that the Mexican DTOs expanded their trafficking activities to Central America and South America, the possibility that the cartels are seeking opportunities in Europe is not unlikely. At this point, taking into consideration that official sources like EUROPOL, the EMCDDA and Italian agencies claim that the Mexican DTOs have an increasing role in cocaine trafficking, I developed the following hypothesis:

*The perceived increase in the importance of the Mexican DTOs in the cocaine trafficking to Europe since the 2000s may be linked to two independent variables that can be better understood through the application of historical institutionalism in international relations due to its consideration to critical junctures and path dependency; on the one hand it is a consequence of the counter narcotic strategies implemented in Mexico after 2006 and on the other hand it is related to the strengthening role that Mexican cartels have on the cocaine routes in Latin America.*

My hypothesis will be tested through the analysis of the two independent variables using a methodology that is explained in the next chapter. At this point, the perception about the Mexican DTOs activities in Europe may or may not reflect that the DTOs are in fact acquiring such a relevant role. At this point, by answering my research question I will be clarifying the real role that the Mexican DTOs play in the cocaine routes to Europe, and at the same time, by testing the hypothesis I will bring light to understanding of the perceptions about the transatlantic role of the Mexican DTOs.

## **Chapter 2 Methodology**

### **2.1 Introduction**

My research uses a positivist ontology. The reason for such a choice is because the existence of the study subject is completely separate from the existence of the researcher (Stahl, 2007; Howell, 2013; Ryan, 2018). In this case, the development of security issues such as the evolution of criminal organizations like the Mexican DTOS and the roles that they play in the trafficking routes is something completely independent from me as the researcher. The reason for such a perception is that, on the one hand, the Mexican DTOs exist as consolidated entities; and, on the other hand, due to their violent profile I did not have direct access to such criminal organizations.

Furthermore, positivists claim that the validity of results depends on the consistency observed through the empirical data (Keat, 2013, p.3). In the case of my research, such empirical data was collected mainly from qualitative data sources such as a purposeful sample in the form of open-ended interviews and questionnaires, as it will be explained later in this chapter. However, it is important to consider that the study of Mexican DTOs poses a considerable challenge. First, because the collection of quantitative information from the organizations is a life-threatening affair; and second, because there is questionable reliability on the statistics related to drug trafficking activities. For example, the amount of drug seizures is not necessarily indicating the amount of drug being trafficked because there is no way to accurately calculate the drug that is successfully reaching its destination. The same happens with homicide rates, which show only the amount of deaths registered by the authorities, but not of the bodies that are still hidden. To cope with this situation, I decided to develop a case study using multiple triangulation of data to allow the integration and corroboration of the quantitative and qualitative data.

By analysing the outcomes of the empirical data and contrasting it with other sources of information about the evolution of the role of the Mexican DTOs in cocaine trafficking, I could present an accurate analysis of the state of the problem. In this regard, the research question was answered by collecting and analysing empirical information from interviews and questionnaires, as well as through the analysis that came from a process of data triangulation.

### **2.2 My chosen methodology: A qualitative method approach with case study**

Criminal organisations are difficult to analyse because their illegal nature represents an obstacle for any data collection, from personal interviews to statistical and numeric data on their organisations and their decisions. In contrast to legal organisations, criminal groups do not publish an "Annual report of activities and finances" or other documents related to the composition of their organisation. This lack of information makes any analysis inherently incomplete. Considering the lack of information and the complexity of the topic, I recognised that a qualitative methodology was best suited to carry on my research because its purpose is to systematically describe and interpret a phenomena through qualitative tools and data (Mohajan, 2018). The qualitative method approach



helped me to maximize the accuracy of my research despite the impossibility of collecting reliable quantitative data related to the expansion of the Mexican DTOs.

The use of qualitative techniques and information, such as open ended interviews helped me to cope with the empirical information that cannot be obtained. For example, due to the violent profile of the Mexican DTOs, it was not possible to interview any members of such organisations. It is still very dangerous to try to find and interview a drug cartel member in the street because they are forcing censorship by killing journalists and other members of the civil society (Seelke, 2018). Even an interview of imprisoned members is a hazard because the prisons are co-opted to some extent by the criminal organisation (Guerrero, 2012 and Dittmar, 2017). The violence against journalists and the Mexican civil society makes it very risky to gather empirical information about the configuration of the cartels.

In addition, quantitative measurements regarding criminal organisations face some challenges. During my years as a security practitioner, I could observe that the issue of transnational organised crime and its behaviour is an evolving phenomenon in which the measurements of the phenomena are affected by either the incomplete registries (in the case of the black numbers of what people do not call the police) and the difficulty of having a direct approach to the object of study. In this regards, using a qualitative methodology allows for the observation of all the variables that affect criminal organizations. As it can be seen, there are specific challenges when investigating Mexican criminal groups in terms of personal security, violence and missing information. Moreover, when researching Mexican OCGs there is a need to cope with the challenges posed by insecurity, the covert nature of the illicit activities and the classified data that security agencies cannot share.

The hypothesis of my thesis seeks to test the relation between the perception of the strengthening role that the Mexican DTOs have had in the cocaine trafficking to Europe on the one hand; and Mexican counter narcotic strategies and the increased participation that Mexican DTOs have in Latin American drug trafficking on the other hand. However, there are different pieces of information that are needed to confirm the dependency between variables. The reason for this is that, unlike legal business that have public records of their transactions and are legally available for interviews; the Mexican cartels are covert by nature. Furthermore, the illicit and violent career of their members makes it very dangerous to carry out a considerable number of interviews to inquire about their illicit activities.

In addition, it is very relevant to observe that there is no public quantitative records that trace the trans-Atlantic behavior of Mexican DTOs. Furthermore, there are national datasets of drug seizures or arrests, but no database is directed to the criminal organizations. To cope with this, I decided to interview subject matter experts with specialization in counter narcotic operations in Mexico and in the cocaine routes to Europe (consult the section “Data Collection and Analysis” in Chapter 2). The quantitative data was used to complement my research about Mexican DTOs, and their roles in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. Furthermore, due to the differences of the pieces of information, I decided to use multiple triangulation for the data analysis. It allows to analyze qualitative and quantitative data surrounding the cartels, which helped to create a more complete picture of what is

happening as it is explained later in this chapter.

### **Selecting the case study type and defining its parts.**

In terms of the structure of my research, I decided to use a case study, this helped analyse a real-life phenomenon. In particular, because case study "facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allow for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood." (Baxter and Jack, 2008, p. 544).

The selection of a case study design was based on the assumption that a variety of lenses and sources could provide a more accurate understanding of a specific phenomenon. Bryman (2012, p.67) states that the emphasis of this kind of research relies on "an extensive examination of the setting." In the same way, Yin (2012, p.4) explains that case-study research produces "an invaluable and deep understanding -hopefully resulting in new learning about real-world behaviour and its meaning." Moreover, it also "assumes that examining the context and other complex conditions related to the case(s) being studied are integral to understanding the case(s)" (2012, p.4). This reinforces my idea that by understanding the context and circumstances related to the cartels, it is possible to understand the way they behave.

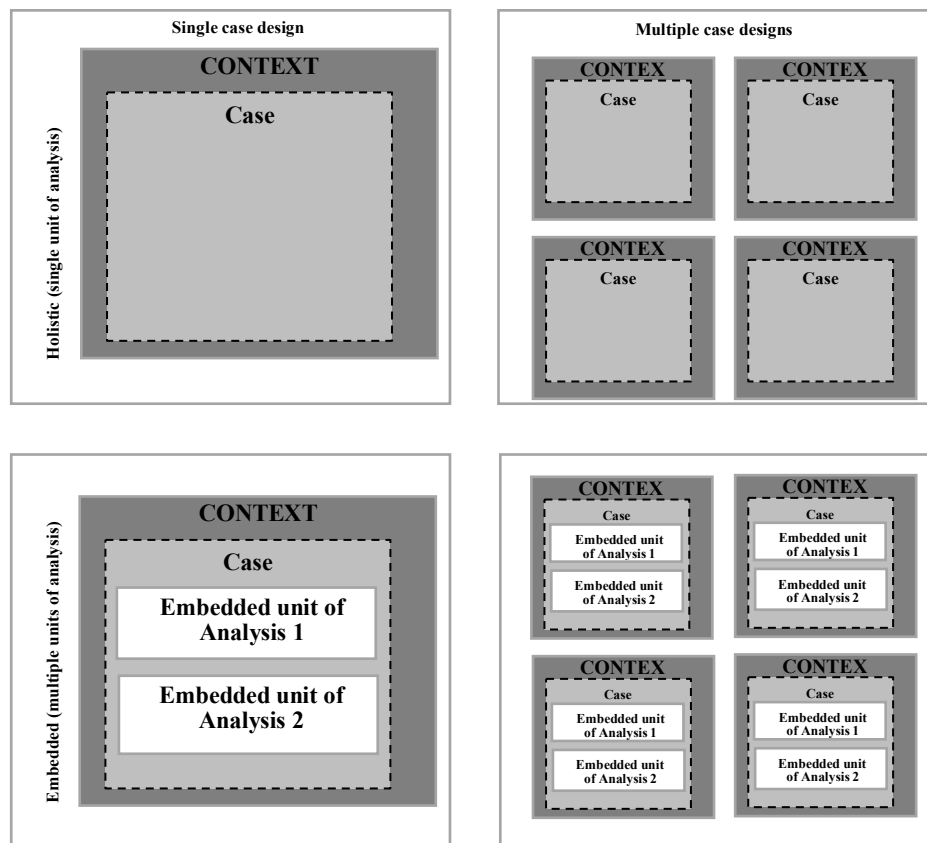
Therefore, my choice of using a case study as the research design allowed me to integrate multiple sources and study the cartels in their real-life context. Applying a case study design permitted the consideration of the variety of contexts under which the cartels are transnationalizing, instead of just considering their attitude or their relation towards the government. Thus, a case study approach allows the study of different variables such as social, economic and political scenarios under which the drug cartels had developed over time and continue to do so.

### **Defining the parts of the case study**

Before creating the case study, there was a requirement to understand the characteristics and different components of a case study. Miles and Huberman (2013) state that "we can define a case as a phenomenon of some sort occurred in a bounded context" (2013, p.28). Similarly, Yin defines case study "as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; and specially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2003, p.13). The consideration of the context allows a better understanding of the phenomena in question and at the same time it helps the identification of the circumstances that affect the phenomena.

The importance of the context is further developed by Yin (2003, p.40) in his different models of case studies presented in Figure 1. The context plays a role in every case study, but not all cases are the same. As it can be observed, Yin divided the cases in Single or Multiple case designs and Holistic or Embedded with units of analysis. In any design, the context and the case are two different things.

Figure 1 Yin's models of case study



Source: Retrieved from Yin, 2003, p.40

In further differentiation between the case and the context, Gillham (2000, p.1) defines a case as: “a unit of human activity embedded in the real world; which can only be studied or understood in context; which exists in the here and now; that merges in with its context so that precise boundaries are difficult or draw.” In a similar way, Thomas (2011, p.512) explains the case study, as being incorporated by two components: *a subject* and *an analytical frame or object*. This definition is similar to Yin's (2003, p.40) composition of "units of analysis" and the "context of the case".

It can be said that a “case study” refers to a phenomenon that is being studied. In the interest of my research, I identified the phenomenon as the transnationalization process of the Mexican cartels to Europe. The context that interacts with the phenomenon refers to all the different national and international factors that are affecting the phenomenon. In this case, it is impossible to understand the Mexican DTOs without understanding the national and regional context, before then proceeding to analyse the phenomena in Europe.

Furthermore, the case studies differ per the objective of the research. Berg (2001) follows the divisions presented by Yin (1993, p.3), exploratory, explanatory and descriptive case studies. Berg explains that the first one, the exploratory type, explores the case generally as a prelude for a more in-depth study. The second one, the explanatory type, is used for causal studies, to understand organisations that may be affected by multiple variables. The third one, descriptive case studies, "require that the investigator presents a

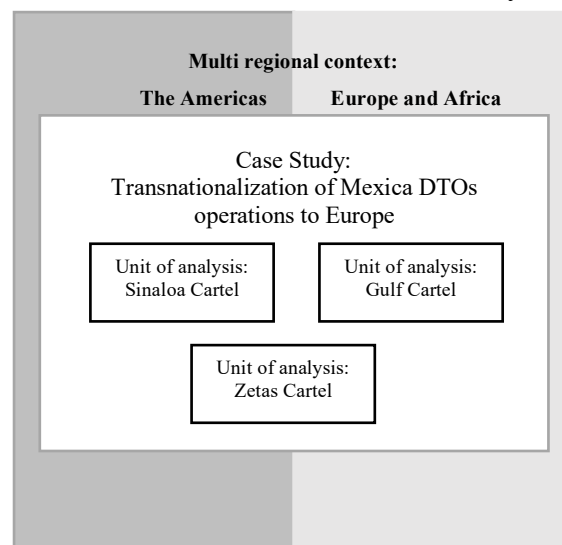
descriptive theory, which establishes the overall framework for the investigator to follow throughout the study” (Berg, 2001, p.230). This division was particularly useful to clarify the construction of my case study.

I developed my case study as an explanatory type because my objective was to construct an explanation about the expansive role of the Mexican DTOs in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. An explanatory case would allow me to identify and analyse different parts of the context that influenced this process. With this in mind, I decided to use Yin’s embedded design of single case study and adapt it to my research because it allows for identification of units of analysis within a case inside a context.

In my case study design, the case is the phenomena of the increase role of the Mexican DTOs in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. The selected units of analysis were three Mexican DTOs and the context was divided into regions. On the one hand, I observed the process of transnationalization in the Americas because it was the first internationalisation that the Mexican DTOs carried out. On the other hand, I analysed Europe as a relevant consumer of drugs and Africa as the transshipment point for the narcotic routes from the Americas to Europe to observe how the Mexicans were increasing their role there.

This led me to create a design that considered a multi-regional context as it can be seen in Figure 2. This type of context is needed because it helps to understand and explain the complexity of the international environment in which DTOs and its criminal associates operate. This context includes the production and consumption dynamics, the evolution and behaviour of the supply and demand, and the realities of the interacting illicit networks in terms interactions with legal members and developments on specific counter trafficking policies.

Figure 2 Embedded Transnational Case Study with multi-regional contexts



Source: created by the author adapting the designs presented by Yin, 2003, p.40.

## Selection of the units of analysis

If the case study examines the phenomena of transnationalization of Mexican drug cartels into Europe, the units of analysis will be those cartels that had been identified for having any relation to European drug trafficking groups or the European drug market. The selection of the first unit of analysis for this study was the Sinaloa Cartel. It was one of the most powerful cartel in Mexico during the last three decades, and was led by Joaquín Guzmán Loera until his capture and extradition to the U.S. in 2017.

The second unit of analysis was the Gulf cartel. During the 2000s, this cartel was the second most powerful DTO in Mexico. However, after the break up with its military branch, the Zetas, its relevance decreased. Nevertheless, at the moment of beginning this research the report of the 2015 Direzione Nazionale Antimafia (DNA, 2016, p.192) in Italy pointed out that the Gulf cartel had a business agreement with the Italian mafia 'Ndrangheta. Due to previous Italian reports (see DNA, 2012, p. 134; DNA 2014, p.166) that linked this mafia organisation with the Zetas, it was not clear at the beginning of this research if the Italian reports were referring to the Zetas, or if the old Gulf cartel was indeed gaining international relevance while remaining a grey actor in Mexico.

The third unit of analysis was the Zetas cartel. This was selected because it was considered the second most powerful criminal organisation in Mexico at the beginning of the 2010s. The Zetas were the former military branch of the Gulf cartel. They are highly violent and, as stated in the 2014 Annual Report of the Direzione Nazionale Antimafia (DNA, 2015, p.24), the Zetas were collaborating with Italian mafia organisations in the cocaine trafficking to Italy. The information published by the DNA was the main reason why I included this group in the units of analysis. Its inclusion was useful because it allowed an in-depth research of the role of the Zetas in Europe, which led to one of the discoveries of this thesis explained in Chapter 6.

To understand the case study material, it was necessary to first consider the unit of analysis before contextualizing them within the international framework, as shown in Figure 2. Therefore, in order to answer the research question about the causes that lead to an increase in importance of the Mexican DTOs in the cocaine routes to Europe, one of the first activities carried out during this research was to understand the background of the cartels identified as the units of analysis. This refers to who were the drug cartels in Mexico, where they came from, and how they gained so much power. The relevant aspect of constructing the case study was that my research could take advantage of all the available information, regardless of its quantitative or qualitative type.

At this point, the use of multiple triangulation of data allowed a better explanation of the units of analysis and the different contexts in which they interact. In other words, my logic was to understand the units of analysis first, and then analyse the national and international variables that affect their development. Through the use of qualitative methods I was able to gather enough information to explain the origins and characteristics of the three units of analysis, the three cartels selected for the study. After such explanation I went to explain and analyse the variables mentioned in my hypothesis as having an effect on the increased importance that the Mexican cartels have in the cocaine trafficking to Europe.

### 2.3 Data collection and analysis

In terms of the data collection, Yin explains that "good case studies benefit from having multiple sources of evidence." (2012, p. 10). In a more specific way, the study of organisations requires gathering enough information about these actors to understand their insight life. (Berg 2001, p.233) The best approach to understand the behaviour of the cartels would be to have direct interviews with cartel members, particularly their leaders or former leaders, about the history and decisions of the organisation. It is important to clarify that the objective of this research was not to understand the inner interaction/life of the cartels but to understand their increased importance in cocaine trafficking to Europe. However, the Mexican cartels have a profile of extreme violence, that includes torture, disappearances and assassination of the journalists who reported about them and of the members of the civil society that had once defied the criminals. This profile makes it extremely dangerous to conduct direct interviews or data collection with cartel members.

To counter the challenge posed by the dangers observed by the profile of DTOs and the lack of information, I decided to use the multiple triangulation approach. Denzin (300) explains that triangulation involves the use of multiple methods to overcome research challenges. Similarly, other authors, (Suharyanti et al. 2017, para. 13; Guidon et al., 2011) observe that triangulation is used by qualitative researchers to obtain and verify the validity of the findings, and strengthen the accuracy of the study.

In a more detailed way, triangulation can happen in different parts of the research process. It can involve the use of different methodologies, the participation of different researchers, the use of different data sources, and even the combination of theories (Denzin, 2009, p.301). In the case of my study, the greatest challenge I needed to solve was the absence of accurate actualized information about the Mexican DTOs activities in the cocaine routes to Europe. For this reason, I decided to use data and sources triangulation.

Data triangulation refers specifically to the information or data used for the study. The researcher "explicitly search for as many different data sources as possible which bear upon the events of the analysis" (Denzin, 2009, p.301) For my research I decided to collect different pieces of information related to the DTOs. The sources of my data, as it is presented in Table 1 and Table 2, were varied and included the collection of official documents and analysis about social and political developments related to drug trafficking and counter narcotics operations at the national and international levels (including security policies, military operations and political control), official reports and press releases about the cartel's losses (arrest or death of the cartel's leaders and seizures), and levels of violence (in terms of death rates and specific violent episodes), as well as specific relations collected from the interviews and questionnaires from Subject Matter Experts<sup>1</sup> (SME) in the counter narcotics field.

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<sup>1</sup> Subject matter expert refers to someone that has mastery knowledge about a subject in regards to its structure, process and outcome and at the same time he or she has an ability to communicate his or her knowledge. (Lavin et al., 2007; Kasper, 1995)

In terms of the method used to collect the data, I also used triangulation because it widened the information that I could use to analyse my case study. This includes among others, the collection of interviews and questionnaires, as well as the use of official surveys. The different results are contrasted to observe similarities, which allows the establish the validity of the results (Guion et al. 2011, para. 8). The application of method triangulation includes the need to be constantly assessing the quality of incoming data and adapting the research strategies as needed (Denzin, 2009, p. 310). The evolution of the data collection method was particularly useful at the moment of finding certain challenges in terms of the availability and attitude of the possible sources of information.

In this way, multiple triangulation allows not only the collection of multiple sources, but in some parts, it also means the observation of the data at different levels. This aids in furthering the analysis of the relations of events, policies, and statistics. It can be said that this can pose the difficulty of collecting too much varied information from different areas, including politics, economics and demography. However, I consider that the more in-depth the knowledge of the context surrounding a phenomenon and its actors, the easier it is to understand the case study and its units of analysis.

A practical example of the benefits of multiple triangulation can be observed in the homicide rates in Mexico. Scholars that talk about the homicide rate take it as whole from the national statistics (Zepeda, 2018; Luque, 2015). Even annual analysis of violence in Mexico (Calderón et al 2018 and Heinle et al. 2017) are limited in time and historical context. Using data triangulation, I collected the official criminal homicide statistics from each of the 32 states of Mexico, per each month from 1990 to 2015. The statistics were used to create a massive chart that allowed more detailed observations that in some cases were inconsistent with the analysis made by observing the annual statistics. These observations were a guide to research further historical events that took place in each state, and that allowed a more comprehensive explanation of how the cartels changed their violent behaviour over time.

Furthermore, the used of method triangulation for the data collection maximizes the collection of quantitative and qualitative data from primary and secondary sources. My primary source of qualitative information was collected in the form of open-ended interviews and questionnaires as it is explained in the next section. As secondary sources I decided to use official governmental publications about the Mexican DTOs. My rationale was that the reports reflect two aspects of the problem: 1) it shows part of what the government acknowledges about the problem (the confidential information is still unknown); and 2) the factors that the government is taking into consideration to formulate its counter narcotic policies. Then I used publications from NGOs to compare the information provided by the government to produce a better analysis. A detailed example of the data collection can be observed in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1 Data Sources

	Counter Narcotic Policies (explanations)	TOC groups Behaviour	Cocaine trafficking evolution	Presence of cartels in Europe	Correlation between policies and cartel behaviour	Annual estimates of drug production and trafficking	International Agreements	Levels of violence	Cartel' s loses
<b>Reports</b>									
Governmental reports	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Governmental statistics						x		x	x
Governmental briefs	x		x			x			
Governmental press release	x	x	x				x		x
<b>Publications</b>									
IGO reports	x	x	x			x		x	
NGO reports	x	x	x		x			x	
Journalistic investigations	x	x	x					x	
Newspaper articles	x		x				x	x	x
Books	x	x	x		x		x	x	
Open Ended Interviews and questionnaires									
High ranking personnel	x	x	x	x	x		x		x
Highly experienced personnel	x	x	x	x	x				



Table 2 Specific Data Type and Sources

	Sources																							
	Government Ministries and Agencies																IGOs			NGO				
	Mexico					Italy			UK		US						UN	EU						
Main Data Types	SEDENA	SEMAR	PGR	Presidential docs.	INEGI	DNA	DIA	DCSA	NCA	UK.GOV	DEA	FBI	OFAC	DOJ	DOS	DOD	Interviews	UNODC	General Assembly	EMCDDA	EUROPOL	INTERPOL	Newspapers	Think Tanks
Governmental efforts and strategies	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X					X							
Intergovernmental CTOC efforts																	X							
Governmental operations	X	X		X		X	X	X	X		X	X				X	X				X	X	X	X
Governmental activities reports				X		X	X	X		X				X	X	X								
Governmental calculations/estimates				X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X		X			X	X	X	
Indictments													X	X										
Violence rates	X	X	X	X	X							X						X					X	
Drug crops rates	X	X		X							X				X			X			X			
Homicides rates	X	X	X	X	X							X						X		X			X	
International Drug Reports									X		X	X						X		X	X			
TOC Assessments						X	X	X	X		X	X	X				X	X		X	X	X	X	
Criminal Group Assessment						X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X			X	X		X			X	X
Analysis on counter narcotic practices	X	X	X			X	X	X	X		X	X	X				X							X
Personal Experience fighting crime																	X							
Timelines of Mexican DTOs																							X	X
Journalistic publications and News																							X	

## Primary sources

### Elite interviews and questionnaires

For the interviews and questionnaires I used purposeful sampling focused on security practitioners with a solid specialization in Mexican organisations and/or countering-cocaine trafficking. My objective was to interview practitioners with a minimum of 10 years of experience in fighting cocaine trafficking and counter narcotic analysis and operations; the idea was to be able to compare their experiences and observations. My logic was that, if the Mexicans were playing a significant role in the transnational cocaine

trafficking to Europe, this would show in the answers given by the interviewees. In addition, the open ended format would allow me to ask further specific questions regarding each interviewee.

My purposeful sampling referred to security Subject Matter Experts (SMEs). This means members of the security community with two main characteristics. The first one is that they have considerable experience in fighting cocaine trafficking. The second one is that they have specific focus on the analytic or strategic part of counter narcotic activities. The purpose of focusing on both groups, and not in police agents carrying out operations, relates to the role that policemen had as law enforcement agents. While analysts and strategists observe the evolution of the threats, prepare forecast analyses and build strategies, the role of the policemen is to enforce such strategies. This is how security practitioners who are dealing with this issues from the analytic and strategic perspectives, have a better overall knowledge of what is happening with the DTOs and the trafficking phenomena.

It is important to remember that my research question refers to the understanding of the increasing role of Mexican DTOs in the cocaine routes to Europe. In this sense, the cocaine routes to Europe involve regions in three different continents, the Americas, Europe and Africa. For this reason my purposeful sampling was focused on SMEs in Mexico, the United States (because the U.S. is the leader of the countering cocaine trafficking efforts in the Americas); European countries, in particularly Italy and the United Kingdom, and the countries of West Africa as transshipment points to Europe. I thought that by interviewing practitioners from such countries, I would gather enough information to document and explain the evolution of the role of the Mexican DTOs in the cocaine routes to Europe.

The selection of participants was refined during the research process and divided into two categories: (1) international participants and (2) Mexican participants (see Table 3). For the international participants, the criteria for selection was that they needed to have managerial professional experience in the subject of countering drug trafficking organisations and cocaine trafficking. For the Mexican participants, the criteria of selection were that they needed to have managerial professional experience on Mexican security policies and drug trafficking organisations. In general, I looked for professionals with more than 10 years in counter narcotic efforts.

The logic of this selection was that the SMEs in law enforcement were not public figures like politicians or the Directors of the security agencies who usually give press releases about the threats. The work of Clapper (2018) explains that experts within the security community are people working within these agencies, and whose only purpose is to understand and create a current and a prospective analysis of perceived threats and risks. The success of their job is not graded in terms of the amount of peer-reviewed publications or quotations, but in their ability to observe trends, forecast the growth of a threat, and help to either reduce the threat or avoid the incidence of tragedies.

The first consideration for me as a researcher was that the current SMEs are highly valuable assets for any agency. These persons are inaccessible from outside the security agencies because normally the agencies do not disclose their names and do not authorize them to give interviews. This is a way in which the agency protects the identity of its personnel. Although it made me feel safe when I was working in the government, I found it

difficult to approach security communities in other countries while I was doing this thesis.

At this point, my previous professional experience in Mexico proved very useful because it allowed me to contact colleagues that had professional experience in the specific areas that I was researching. Although some would not participate because their agencies forbid any interviews, they would share open source articles that they considered objective and accurate. Most of my interviewees were weary talking about the cartels due to sensitive information; hence, they spoke about their professional observations regarding DTOs without violating any confidential agreements with their own agencies. At this point I must clarify that I did not receive any confidential information from any of my interviewees.

As for the interviews of professionals from other countries, I began by writing to security agencies in Italy and the U.K., but due to security reasons they would not grant interviews nor grant me access to their SMEs. I changed my approach and I decided to attend events in which I met practitioners with the profile I needed. I attended several events of the Standing Group on Organised Crime from the European Consortium for Political Research and of the Strategic Hub on Organised Crime of the Royal United Service Institute. At these events, I met members of the British National Crime Agency who had considerable experience in countering narcotics strategies and operations.

At the same time, I attended several courses at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies (GCMC) where I met security practitioners specialized in countering cocaine trafficking. Apart from the interviews, my interaction with other practitioners provided me valuable knowledge about their experiences in the fight against drug trafficking organisations. Additionally, it gave me knowledge about how the different agencies protect their personnel and prevent them from giving interviews or talking their expertise publicly.

What is more, by attending events and courses that involved the security practitioners focused on countering drug trafficking, I was able to talk to them personally and they would normally agree to be interviewed. Additionally, my interviewees were willing to connect me with other practitioners with enough experience and knowledge in the field of countering drug trafficking operations and drug trafficking.

Furthermore, due to the limited availability of public contact with the SMEs inside the security agencies, the method of contacting the participants became a snowball effect, between SMEs that I've met in the past or during the professional security courses I attended during the past four years at the GCMC. Altogether, the interviews integrated the counter narcotic knowledge from current and retired security practitioners (with careers in the military, the navy, the intelligence and the police agencies), from the Mexico's CNS, SEGOB, SEMAR, SEDENA and CISEN; Italy's Navy, and Military; the United States' Navy, Military and Department of State; the United Kingdom's NCA; and members of the Military and the Police from Guinea, Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire.

Table 3 Interviewees

SM E no.	Type	Date	Interviewee origin	Type interaction of	CTOC Experien ce
1	Civilian/ activist	9-Nov-16	Italy	Face to face	+10 years
2	Civilian/ government	24-Nov-16	Mexico	Face to face	+10 years
3	Armed forces	26 Nov-16	Italy	Face to face	+40 years
4	Civilian/ government	6-Dec-16	U.S.	Face to face	+30 years
5	Armed forces	2-Dec-16	Italy	Skype	+ 10 years
6	Civilian/ Intelligence	10-Jan-17	Mexico	Face to face	+ 10 years
7	Civilian/ government	23-Jan-17	Mexico	Face to face	+20 years
8	Civilian/agent	23-Feb-17	U.S.	Face to face	+20 years
9	Armed forces	17 Nov-17	Mexico	Questionnaire	+ 30 years
10	Military	16-Nov-17	U.S.	Face to face	+ 30 years
11	Civilian/LEA	16-Nov-17	U.S.	Face to face	+ 30 years
12	Armed forces	24-Apr-18	Italy	Face to face	+20 years
13	Armed forces	24-Apr-18	Guinea	Face to face	+ 30 years
14	Military	24-Apr-18	Ghana	Face to face	+ 10 years
15	Civilian/governme nt	28-Sept-18	Mexico	Question	+10 years
16	Civilian/Academia - Journalism	26-Jun-18	Italy	Skype	+30 years
17	Civilian/governme nt	18-Jun-18	U.K.	Skype	+30 years
18	Civilian/governme nt	25-Jul-18	U.K.	Personal	+ 30 years
19	Armed forces	21-Aug-18	U.S.	Personal	+ 40 years
20	Military/Civilian	5-Dec-18	Guinea Bissau	Questionnaire	+10 years
21	Military/Civilian	4-Dec-18	Nigeria	Questionnaire	+10 years
22	Military/Civilian	29-Nov-18	Nigeria	Questionnaire	+10 years

23	Civilian/government	10 January 19	U.K.	Skype/Questionnaire	+10 years
24	Civilian/government	21/05/2019	Mexico	Questionnaire	+20 years
25	Armed forces	21/05/2019	Mexico	Questionnaire	+20 years
26	Civilian/government	5/June/2019	Ghana	Questionnaire	+25 years
27	Law enforcement	27/Aug/2019	UK	Questionnaire	25 years
28	Armed forces	19/Sept/2019	Mexico	Questionnaire	+5 years

Except for the interviewees who shared the contact of another possible participant, there was no acquaintance between the interviewees. An example of what this means is that the interviewees from the SEDENA in Mexico did not know nor meet their national counterparts at SEMAR, or their peers from other agencies in different countries. In the same way, the participants from the NCA never had any interaction with neither the Mexican or Italian interviewees. The same applies to the participants from Italy.

Thanks to this snowball process I collected information from 27 elite members of the international community of security SMEs with practical and policy experience in countering drug trafficking and counter narcotic operations. This included agency directors, strategy-planners, police officers, security officers, and intelligence analysts from Ghana, Guinea Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Italy, Mexico, the United States and the United Kingdom. The reason for including the West African countries was related to the emerging relevance of West Africa in the DTO controlled cocaine routes from Latin American production sites to European markets.

I also identified and contacted several public figures that were key elements of the counter DTO efforts during the 2000s. In Mexico, it was the former Mexican Secretary of the Interior during President Calderón's Administration, Dr Alejandro Poiré, because he was also Director of Council of National Security and former Director of the Centre of Investigation and National Security. In the UK, one of the most relevant figures in the counter narcotics efforts is Mr Tony Saggars, who was Head of Drugs Threat for the National Crime Agency until 2017. In Italy, I identified two main actors, Mr Franco Roberti, Former Director of the National Antimafia Directorate (DNA) and Mr Nicola Gratteri, General Attorney in Reggio Calabria because he took part the operation that pointed out the activities of the Mexican drug traffickers in the cocaine routes to Italy in 2007. Additionally, I identified the members of the counter narcotic efforts at the U.S. Southern Command, as SMEs on drug trafficking and the development of Latin American DTOs.

I faced considerable difficulties in the interviews in Italy because they would not answer to any of my interview requests. When I contacted the Italian security agencies, they stated that they do not authorize interviews. Furthermore, despite the many efforts to approach Mr Roberti (former director of the DNA) and Mr Gratteri (persecutor in the

Calabrian region), it was not possible to establish contact with them. The only contact I managed to get was to ask two questions to Mr Roberti during a conference, but not a formal interview. To counter the lack of availability of most of the Italian SMEs, I reviewed all the annual reports of the DIA, DNA and the DCSA for the period of 2008-2015.

### **The format of the interviews**

This research used open-ended interviews because its flexibility helped me to gather better information during the interviews. The same can be said about collecting testimonies from high-level personnel in the topic of the development of the evolution of international cocaine routes. I created a general set of questions which can be found in Appendix 1, and these were adapted to each interview, adding or eliminating questions per their nationality and their place of expertise. For example, the SMEs concerned with the cocaine flow from Colombia to the U.S. were asked fewer questions about European cocaine flows than those asked to the knowledge of different agencies in regards to the cocaine trafficking problem and the organisations that are smuggling it.

In all the cases I asked the SMEs to explain the evolution of the cocaine route to Europe; the objective of such question was to observe if there was any casual mention of the Mexicans as having a relevant role. Then I would proceed to ask specific and individual questions about the involvement of Mexican DTOs in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. The main purpose of interviewing SMEs from different regions was to compare the answers to understand if the Mexicans had had an increasing role in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. In some cases, the participants could give me an interview, but they would ask for the questions to answer them in their own time. At this point, the questions I used for the interview were sent as a questionnaire that they would answer. This method was used as an alternative for the participants who were happy to share their experiences, but that had no time for the interview or who had language constraints. The procedures for this part of the data gathering process was sending the questionnaire via electronic mail. All those subjects that agreed to get the questionnaire sent it back with their answers. The limitation of this approach is that I needed to wait for their answers, and in some cases the answers came after several months.

### **Record and treatment of the empirical information**

Due to the specific profile of my interviewees, it was very important to have a clear channel of communication about the project and how their testimonies would be used. When I first approached the interviewees, I always made clear that my study was approved by the Ethical Committee of the POLIS department of the University of Bath. In addition, all the participants received an information sheet and a consent form that can be accessed in Appendix 2. The original consent form changed minimally after the first interviews, adapting comments from the interviewees, to add the consent of recording or not recording the interview.

Some participants gave their consent under the condition that their names were not mentioned at any point of the study. This situation was related to the security clearances and job responsibilities of some of the interviewees. For that reason, I created a method to use the information without attribution which I decide to use to refer to all the interviewees. For

that purpose, I call then all Subject Matter Experts or SME, and I numbered them in the order in which I carried out the interviews.

In the same way, the consent sheet included a part in which they could accept or declined being recorded. Most of the participants declined, so I used my computer or a notepad to write down their answers. In an interview with a high-ranking practitioner, I was summoned to an official governmental building in which I needed to give up any electronic devices to the security personnel at the entrance. During the interview, the participant seemed uncomfortable by my note-taking, so I decided to put down the pen and look at the interviewer without distraction. The interviewee relaxed and talked for one hour about details that were explicitly asked not to be mentioned or the information quoted in the research. The reason why this experience is being presented is related to how academics can approach security practitioners. In some cases, the conditions are not favourable due to job responsibilities and or sensibility of the information.

Regardless of the case, after the interview I transcribed either the recording or the notes –if these were not digital already– using Microsoft Word, creating one document per participant. At this point, I formatted all the documents in a questionnaire style which facilitated the use of information once I began contrasting the content of the answers. For those SMEs who answered the questionnaire and send it back via email, I also formatted their documents to match the visual presentation with my other transcriptions.

### **Sample representation**

This research gathered interviews and questionnaires from 28 SMEs. The sample of the of SMEs was composed by 8 SMEs from Mexico, 5 from Italy, 5 from the U.S., 4 from the UK; 2 from Ghana, 2 from Nigeria, 1 from Guinea and 1 from Guinea Bissau. The experts from West African countries were very difficult to contact, but very important for this research because West Africa was identified to be an active transshipment point for the cocaine smuggled to Europe.

In terms of the representation of the sample in the overall SMEs security community, it is something difficult to measure in this research due to the selected purposeful sample. Sampling SMEs from the security community means to have access to a partially hidden group that would normally be inaccessible for interviews. The information about how many counter narcotic analysts there are in any LEA is not public information. Furthermore, my intention was not only to interview counter narcotic SMEs, but only those that had expertise with the Mexican DTOs and/or cocaine trafficking to Europe.

At this point, we must not forget the difficulty of interviewing members of the community of CTOC SMEs is that the access to this community is restricted or inaccessible due to security measures. In terms of sample representation, it is not possible at this point to state how representative was the sample of my interviewees. This is due to the fact that security agencies do not make public the precise number of SMEs they have on each subject. I tried to contact all the agencies and possible interviewees dealing with Mexican DTOs in Mexico, the UK and Italy and West African countries. However, it is impossible to know how many SMEs on drug trafficking there are at each agency.

## Secondary sources

The use of secondary sources was a way to complement the information I needed for my analysis. The secondary sources were collected through data triangulation method; and it was used to observe the congruencies or differences with the empirical information. At the same time, the secondary sources aided in the interview process. On the one hand, gathering previous knowledge aided to formulate individual questions for each interviewee. and in the second place. On the other hand, it aided the interviews when some interviewees talked “off the record” but pointed in the right direction for open sourced public information. some cases, the interviewees would explain some sensitive issues, but would ask me to consider that information off the record of the interview. What is more, the use of secondary sources aided the data triangulation ; the use of secondary sources as a complement of what cannot be collected from the primary sources aided me to make a more comprehensive analysis about the behaviour of the DTOs.

**1) Statistical information on violence in Mexico from the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and History.** In an attempt to understand the violence generated by the war on drugs, this research collected the information of “violent homicides” for each month by each state of the Mexican republic, from 1990 until 2016. This process allowed the identification of individual episodes of violence that could be traced to the activities of a specific cartel. A contribution of this research, in terms of the analysis of violence, is that the observation of the violence per state per month allows for new analysis of specific peaks of violence cannot be observed in the national statistics.

**2) Official Governmental publications.** This research collected official documents mainly from the governments of Mexico, Italy, the UK and the US, annual reports, indictments and threat assessments related to the drug trafficking organisations. The collection of these documents was carried out in English, Spanish and Italian from the official pages of each country. In the case of documents in Spanish and Italian, I selected the relevant quotes to be used in the research and translated them to English.

I paid particular attention to the Annual Reports of the Italian agencies (DNA, DIA and DCSA) from 2008 to 2016 because these were the agencies who mentioned the involvement of specific Mexican DTOs in the cocaine flow to Europe. To my knowledge this research represents the first attempt to collect, verify and analyse the information reported by the Italian agencies in regards to the Mexican cartels.

**3) Press releases from the government of Mexico on DTO activities.** In order to identify the past behaviour of the Mexican drug cartels during the War on Drugs inside Mexico, this research consulted more than 200 security-related press releases and selected those talking about the units of analysis. The main source of information was the website <http://calderon.presidencia.gob.mx> which compiles the announcements of all the ministries and security agencies during Calderon’s administration.

**4) Timelines of the drug war and drug cartels collected from open sources.** At the moment of comparing sources while doing background research, I observed that the timelines about the War on Drugs in Mexico were incomplete but complementary. I



collected information from seven open sourced timelines of Calderon's war on drugs (2006-2012) until the information of new sources became repetitive. Through this process I created an integrated timeline. Then I verified the events with the official information published in [calderon.presidencia.gob.mx](http://calderon.presidencia.gob.mx) and in the U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control and the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigations, who publish precise information of efforts and activities and structure of the drug cartels.

## **Data analysis**

As it was previously stated, the prioritization of qualitative data was a coping mechanism to the lack of reliable quantitative information, and the impossibility of approaching and surveying the strategic members of the DTOs. Furthermore, my hypothesis contemplates variables that are very difficult to measure via the quantitative approach. The difficulty comes, again, from the hazard of approaching the criminal Mexican community, which makes it very dangerous to use quantitative tools to verify the causality between counter narcotic policies and the strengthened role of Mexican DTOs in cocaine routes in Latin America on the one hand; and the increase importance of Mexican DTOs in the cocaine trafficking to Europe on the other hand.

In terms of the qualitative information, I used the interviews and questionnaires to obtain the empirical information to answer my research question and verify the hypothesis. I contrasted and analysed the content of the answers between the participants about their knowledge on Mexican DTOs and the cocaine routes to Europe. In most of the cases, the information provided by the participants was complementary to each other, and it helped me document whether or not the Mexican DTOs played a relevant role in cocaine trafficking to Europe. The answers provided by the interviewees were used as part of the multiple triangulation that build my analysis.

Other sources of qualitative data, as observed in Table 1 and 2 were documents of governmental policies, judicial indictments, governmental press releases, reports and analysis on Mexican DTOs and the evolution of cocaine routes. Journal, newspaper articles and NGO reports about the evolution of the Mexican DTOs and their transnational activities. The main aim of such a data triangulation process was gather enough information that could repeat or complement each other, therefore increasing the validity of the results.

The process I followed to analyse the qualitative information was to organize the data at two levels. The first referred to the information about the characteristics and historic evolution of the cartels. The second referred to the information about the interaction between the cartels and exogenous variables observed at the international level; like the counter narcotic policies implemented in other countries besides Mexico, and historical exogenous events that could had exogenously impacted the evolution of Mexican DTOs.

In a more specific way, the information from the different documents was used to complement the information that would be missing from the interviews. For example, the Mexican SMEs had great experience in analysing and tracking the DTOs inside Mexico, but not the same expertise at their international activities. The SMEs from the United States and the United Kingdom had experience in the implementation of policies in Colombia and had empirical operational experience and knowledge about the evolution of cocaine

trafficking to Europe. By triangulating the different pieces of information, I was able to link and verify the validity of the data gathered from the SMEs and the other qualitative types of data.

In terms of quantitative information, I first observed that the statistical data related to illicit organizations, violence and crimes have two critical problems to consider. The first problem is that for any crime reported to the authorities, there is a number of crimes that are never reported; the number of crimes that are not reported is also known as the “black number”. As explained by Angel (2016, Online) in Mexico, the black number could be representative (depending on the crime) of 68% to 89% of the total number of crimes, which implies that the statistics represent 19 to 31 per cent of total numbers of crimes.

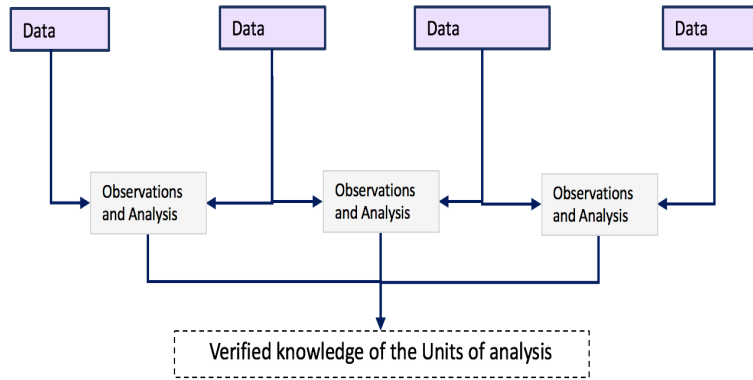
The second problem refers to the impossibility of measurement of relevant information related to the Mexican DTOs and their trafficking activities. For example, there is no way to know with certainty the actual amount of drugs being trafficked or the amount of weapons possessed by a DTO. This difficulty is related to the violent reactions the cartels have against journalist or researchers, which makes the collection of information a very risky enterprise.

For these reasons, the use of quantitative data was only as a complement to the qualitative exercise. The quantitative data referred to raw data that presented information about 1) the violence in Mexico measured in the form of number of homicides; 2) governmental statistics of cocaine consumption and 3) the number of cocaine seizures. Although the data sets were already collected, I used Microsoft Excel to create charts and graphs to observe the evolution of the data according to the period of time. At this point I use quantitative information and quantitative tools for producing the graphs. These products were triangulated and used to complement the analysis of the qualitative data about the evolution of the Mexican DTOs.

The observations made in the quantitative information was also used to identify specific periods of time that showed atypical behaviour of the data. An observed unprecedented increase in the homicides or cocaine seizures was followed by an in-depth gathering of qualitative data of the events that took place during that time. By observing and analysing the historical events and outcomes I was able to answer the research question.

At this point, to simplify the analytic process of the triangulation, I adapted the multiple triangulation process as a visual “puzzle approach” in which I could put ideas into boxes, as it is presented in Figure 3. The reason for this adaptation was for observational purposes. For me as a researcher it is easier to observe things once each thing is put into boxes and can be observed with arrows and colours. Hence, what I called the puzzle approach is my adaptation of the multiple triangulation into a graphic representation of events and actors that were influential on the DTOs evolution and activities.

Figure 3 Puzzle approach, a visual adaptation of multiple triangulation



## 2.4 Limitations of study

This research focused on Mexican DTOs as evolving players within the national and international community. It did not aim to explain the internal structure or functioning of each individual unit. However, to understand its behaviour there is a need for a detailed understanding of the DTOs evolution. Chapter 4 of this thesis aims to explain the development of the social, political and economic context that interacts with the cartels as players of a system. In the same way, the historical explanation of the drug cartels was elaborated to understand the evolution in the behaviour of the Mexican DTOs towards a better understanding of these organisations as actors of the international arena.

Regarding the data collection, the main challenge of this research was the access to and use of current information about the activities of Mexican drug cartels in Europe. Due to the structure of the community of CTOC SMEs and the agencies fighting criminal networks, there could be a long-lasting operation investigating the way Mexican cartels partner with criminal organisations in Italy, Spain or the U.K. However, such information would not be of public knowledge until the investigation is finished and until the use of such knowledge has been exhausted by law enforcement agencies.

An additional consideration is the representation of the sample and the reliability of the interviewees. My intention was to interview subject experts with a deep knowledge and experience in the evolution of the drug trafficking first in Mexico and then between the Americas and Europe. This objective limited the possibilities of collecting information; due to the dangers of working as in CTOC activities, the agencies protect the identity of their assets and it is very difficult to get access to them. There is a difference between interviewing local policemen and interviewing the analysts and directors of the security agencies. The policemen enforce the law while the analysts are the ones creating an understanding of the criminal issues and preparing prospective analyses. The access that analysts and directors have to TOC information and TOC intelligence is wider and their knowledge in criminal networks is deeper.

As for the reliability of the interviewees, there was the possibility that some interviewees would speak trying to influence the information to making their agency look good. In this regard, interviewing practitioners from different countries helped to create a

picture of the phenomenon of trans-Atlantic drug trafficking. The question that required the interviewees to explain the evolution of cocaine trafficking to Europe was a good way to observe how, even though most of the interviewees were from different countries and nationalities, their answers of the interviewees complemented each other. This permitted me to integrate the information and create a narrative about the evolution of trans-Atlantic cocaine trafficking and the actors involved.

Additionally, this thesis makes reference to investigations and trials of Mexican drug traffickers, including Joaquín Guzmán Loera who was sentenced July 2019 (DOJ, 2019). A limitation could be the reliability of the witnesses' statements about the illicit activities of the defendants. To avoid relying too much on one source, I used the puzzle approach to integrate the information from the trials, the answers of the interviewees and previous reports and publications made by other scholars and experts on the subject.

An additional limitation referring specifically to Guzmán Loera is that the transcripts of the trial are sealed by the court and the access to the information was from journalistic sources who attended the trial and reported on what the witnesses said. The trial was carried out between November 2018 and February 2019 (Palmer, 2019). At the moment of finishing the write up of this thesis there was no academic publications that created a deep analysis about the information presented at the trial.

First, it was necessary to understand the internal politics and socioeconomic conditions of the home countries of the criminal groups that are being studied. Then it was necessary to observe the development of each criminal group in relation to their criminal system and the legal actors of their home country. For the international level, it was necessary to study the different social and political developments that took place in other countries (including social unrest, civil wars and bilateral and multilateral agreements), to assess the transnational evolution of the criminal groups. I did my best to develop all the topics and its explanations as clear as possible.

In terms of limitations that I experienced, the first one refers to the language barrier. At the beginning of this research, the Italian official documents, that exposed the connection between Italian and Mexican criminal organisations, could be found only in Italian. As part of my strategy to cope with this disadvantage, I spent two months learning the language in Italy, before commencing the data collection and proceeding with the interviews.

Some of the interviewees were not fluent in English, sometimes they would explain things in their native languages Italian and Spanish, and I would need to translate their answers to integrate them in the thesis. Translating explanations in Spanish to English was not a major problem because I had professional experience on translating governmental reports from one language to the other. In contrast, my experience on translating Italian texts to English was very limited. I was limited by my lack of experience and by my budget which meant that I could not hire a professional translator. To cope with this situation, I sought assistance from native Italians to verify that my English interpretation of the Italian information was accurate.

An additional challenge refers to the research plan versus additional budgetary constraints. The original idea of this thesis was to include Spain as part of the country to carry out empirical data collection, because it is the main port of entry for cocaine to Europe. However, after the first fieldwork experience, I faced budgetary constraints and external obstacles that impeded me from carrying on with the original plan. The reason for mentioning this limitation is explicitly to share a lesson learned during the doctoral research process, which refers not only to having a proper research protocol but having enough budget at all times to see it through.

## **2.5 Strengths of this research**

The present research studies the phenomena of transnationalization of OCGs. The novelty of my approach is that the case study does not compare the situation in different countries, but create a transnational analysis of the phenomena. As it was explained in Chapter 1, most of the narratives about the Mexican cartels focus mainly on the historical development of the DTOs in Mexico, including their role as main suppliers of cocaine to the U.S. This is the first academic research that assesses the role of the Mexican cartels in the cocaine flow to Europe, acknowledging the existence of a transnational criminal network composed by different actors in the Americas, Africa and Europe.

The use of the embedded transnational case study with multi-regional contexts is an asset because it allows one to observe the phenomena considering its evolution in ever changing circumstances. This helped me to examine the differences in behaviour of the cartels in their home country, Mexico, and in other parts of the world. At the same time, the consideration of a transnational context meant that the OCGs were observed within the international community. This exercise helped me to get knowledge not only about the behaviour of the cartels, but about the development of the illicit actors in the international arena.

Furthermore, the multiple triangulation and the development of the puzzle approach presents a visual alternative to study transitional issues when there is little information available. The use of the puzzle approach in each part of the research was a useful exercise to analyse different issues separately at the national and the international level, and then it allowed me to integrate a larger puzzle linking all factors. Through the puzzle visual approach I gained an understanding not only of the actions of the OCGs, but of the interactions between such groups and their multidimensional circumstances.

This methodology helped not only to decompose the complexity of the case study. It allowed a more precise observation of the characteristics of the cartels as units of analysis, and of their dependency to independent variables, like the counter narcotic policies implemented in Mexico. In this relation, the selection of theory became of vital importance to understand the relation between the evolution of the Mexican cartels and their transformation into transnational organised criminal groups. The next chapter presents the theoretical framework applied in my thesis and explains my theoretical observations from the discipline of International Relations.



## **Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework**

The selection of the theory for this thesis was based on two different observations; the first one was that my area of expertise is the observation of international security issues through the discipline of International Relations and its theories; the second one was the observations gathered from the literature review. It was observed that the most experienced authors observe the historical background of the criminal organisations, as well as that of the socio-political and economic conditions that were evolving parallel to the DTOs. In this way, the literature about the evolution and expansion of the Mexican DTOs has insightful considerations towards history and the evolution of political and security institutions as well as of counter narcotic policies.

At this point, I decided to use Historical Institutionalism as the main theory, and at the same time considering the use of Institutional Liberalism theory from the International Relations discipline to support part of the analysis. The first theory is relevant due its interest in the historic evolution of institutions. The second theory is handy to analyse how the DTOs interact within the framework of the international system. The present chapter is divided in three parts. The first one presents the theory of Historical Institutionalism and explains how will it be applied in the present research. The second one presents theoretical developments of Institutionalism in International Relations, particularly Institutional Liberalism, and elaborates on how the Mexican DTOs can be analysed as actors of the international system, even when the state is the main actor. The third part explains how both theories can be used together to observe and understand the phenomenon of the transnationalization of Mexican DTOs.

### **3.1 Historical Institutionalism.**

Historical Institutionalism (HI) is an approach that comes from the development of Institutional theory in Political Science. Peters (2009, p.4) summarizes that traditionally, institutionalism has looked to explain the nature of governing institutions that shaped the behaviour of each person towards improving their conditions, and how the existence of collective purposes could lead to the construction of political institutions. Following this idea, the consideration of what is an institution has evolved with the theoretical evolution of HI. In this regard, my focus on Historical Institutionalism is related to my idea that the OCGs and, in particular, transnational the Mexican DTOs, have the constitution and complexity of an institution.

Hence, HI theory can be used to gather a better understanding of the current status of the international activities of Mexican DTOs. In other words, using HI to analyse the Mexican DTOs is a good strategy to clarify if such organizations have a relevant role in the cocaine trafficking to Europe or not. With this idea in mind, firstly I made a review of the theoretical evolution, characteristics and main arguments of HI. Then, I examined the recent adoption of HI in the discipline of International Relations. Finally, at the end I elaborated my argument on how is it that the use of HI theory contributes to answer my research question through the examination of the historical evolution of the Mexican DTOs.

The theoretical evolution of HI comes from the development of Institutionalism in social sciences. Institutionalism can be divided into old institutionalism and new institutionalism. The first one refers mainly to the development of institutional analysis that evolved during the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries (Peters 2009, p.7). The “new institutionalism”, in which historical institutionalism is grouped, consolidated during the 1980s as a counter position to behavioural perspectives developed during the 1960s and the 1970s (Hall and Taylor, 1996). The focus of “new institutionalism” seeks to understand the different structures, effects and influence that institutions have in political life (Thelen, 1999, p.369). Nonetheless, “new institutionalism” is not one sole approach, but it refers to different schools that focus on the study of institutions.

The New Institutionalism was divided in its early stages into three schools of thought: Historical Institutionalism, Rational Choice Institutionalism and Sociological Institutionalism, in which each school has its own characteristics (Hall and Taylor 1996). As time went by, new approaches were added to the family, like Empirical Institutionalism and Discursive and Constructivist Institutionalism (Peters, 2019). At this point, it is agreed that there are many approaches that fall under the umbrella of New Institutionalism that are developed in different disciplines like Politics and Sociology.

I will now focus on Historical Institutionalism (HI) because it is the approach that is of interest to my research due to its consideration of history. The central notion of HI relies on the idea that historical-based analysis can explain the behaviour of the institutions (Nolin, 2013, p.13). As it will be explained below, historical analysis allows the researcher to consider how previous decisions and events alter the development of institutions along time as well as its interactions and influence over other institutions and the society. At this point, my idea is to use HI to analysed illicit organizations like the Mexican DTOs because of their close interaction with the government and the society.

The emergence of HI was a reaction to the theoretical developments of the time. As explained by Hall and Taylor (1996, p.5-6), HI is a response to the Structural-Functionalism and Group Theories of politics developed during the 1960s and 1970s. The core of Structural Functionalism is based on the adaptation of Darwin’s evolutionary principles to understand social and human behaviour. In the words of Fisher (2010, p.75), “Functionalists equate structure to anatomy and functions to the physiology.” Hence, the theory observes social and political units as living organisms characterised by social patterns created by the individuals that shape the social system.

In this relation, HI took from Structural-Functionalism the notion that polity was a general system of contending fragments, but it rejected the idea that the system was affected mainly by the characteristics of the individuals. Instead HI maintained that “the institutional organization of the polity or political economy as the principal factor structuring collective behaviour and generating distinctive outcomes.” (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p.6). The special attention in history make it observe how all the structures and outcomes along time are shaping present outcomes.

As for Group Theories, such approaches focused on social groups. “Modern systems have specialized structures for articulating the demands of specific groups within the



political system” (Barnes, 1965, p.381). In this theory, the government is the mediator in the competition between groups such as political parties (Okereka, 2015, p. 100). However, it does not pay as much attention to the evolution of social change and social movements (Garson, 1978). At this point, Hall and Taylor (1996) explained that HI accepted the Group Theory’s notion that different groups would compete for resources, but noted that the actions of the institutions would benefit and weaken the interests of the contending groups.

It could be said that for HI, the asymmetries generated by the actions of institutions had the capacity to shape the evolution of the institutions and the societies (Hall and Taylor, 1996). Furthermore, thanks to the influence from Structural-Functionalism, HI observed the government as a complex entity of different institutions rather than the actor than mediates between political actors. By recognizing the individual structure and evolution of each institution within the government, HI recognizes the capacity that each institution to alter the evolution of the government as a whole.

It can be said that one of the core precepts of HI is the study of institutions. Therefore, the first thing to understand about HI is how does this approach define *institutions*. At this point, it is interesting to note that there is no agreed definition on the meaning of *institutions*. As observed by Peters (2019, p. 84), the term is hazier than in other institutionalist approaches. Farrell (2018, p. 32) explains that for some HI academics institutions are observed to be “structures –vast, enduring, and solid patterns of social organization at the level of the nation state, which are relatively stable over the long run, shaping more particular forms of political and social behaviour. For others, they are processes–rules, procedures, or policies that change over time.”

Some examples of the different interpretations of HI scholars are observed with the different definitions presented by authors such as Ikenberry (1988), Thelen and Steinmo (1992), Hall and Taylor (1996) and Steinmo (2008). The first, Ikenberry (1988, p.223), considers that institutions can include the state institutions as well as the normative social structures of a country. Similarly, Thelen and Steinmo (1992) observe that the concept of institutions includes state structures such as the congress, legal institutions and the different social classes. From formal structured organs like governmental congresses, to social classes, all the above represent different institutions that take part in the development of politics and of the society.

Meanwhile, Hall and Taylor (1996, p. 6) note that institutions refer to “formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions embedded in the organizational structure of the polity or political economy.” This is a vaguer definition as it includes norms and routines to be considered as institutions, having the power to influence political outcomes. In a later explanation, Steinmo (2008, p.159) explained that “The most common definition for institutions is: rules.” Rules are important because, whether formal or informal, they shape who participates in politics, influencing its strategic behaviour.

For my research, the vagueness in the definition of institutions, allows me to consider the Mexican DTOs as institutions. Restating part of Farrell’s definition (2018), it can be said that the Mexican cartels are vast enduring structures with solid patterns of social organization. Although they do not belong to the governmental apparatus, through the use

of violence and cohesion, the DTOs in Mexico have had the capacity to alter and influence the priorities and actions of legally constituted institutions in the different levels of the governmental and in the social level.

The second aspect to understand HI is its consideration towards history. As explained by Steinmo (2008, p.164-165) history matters because 1) “political events happen within a historical context which has a direct consequence on the decisions or events.” 2) “actors or agents can learn from experience. Historical institutionalists understand that behaviour, attitudes and strategic choices take place inside particular social, political, economic and even cultural contexts.” 3) “expectations are also moulded by the past.” Hence, current outcomes are shaped by the evolution past context, decisions and expectations.

In the quest for understanding what changes the evolution of institutions, Ikenberry (1994, p.11) explains that HI “focuses on the ‘pre-existing structures of social relations and their often unintended consequences. Past circumstances weigh heavily on what is possible and what is perceived as desirable at specific moments.” The study of the relation between the development of institutions and past circumstances and unintended consequences lead to the development of HI’s three central concepts; path dependency, critical junctures and sequencing. Such concepts help to explain how history affects the evolution of institutions over time.

The first concept is known as critical junctures, which means that change is also caused by fast and perhaps unexpected events. Fioretos et al (2016, p.8) explain that one of the first contributions that clarified the concept of critical junctions was the definition made by Collier and Collier (1991, p. 29) who state that it is “period of significant change, which typically occurs in distinct ways in different countries (or in other units of analysis) and which is hypothesized to produce distinct legacies.” The consideration of other units of analysis is particularly handy in this thesis because, as explained in Chapter 2, the units of analysis are three Mexican cartels.

The evolution of the concept of critical junctures can be always seen as related to specific occurrences. In this regard, Peters (2019, p. 91) refers to Capoccia and Lelemen, (2007) to explain that the idea behind critical junctures “involves the confluence of events and actors during a relatively short period of time.” Early HI scholars explained that institutions could rest unchanged in a position of equilibrium, but change occurs when there is something with sufficient force to affect the equilibrium (Krasner, 1984, p.241-242). Such force would come as rapid relevant events; in the case of my thesis such events would be observed as specific happenings or actions with the capacity of generating a change or alter the evolution or the interaction of the Mexican DTOs.

The position of equilibrium mentioned earlier is known as punctuated equilibrium, and is based on the idea that institutions go through long periods of stasis, and such stasis changes only with significant exogenous forces (Krasner 1984; Baumgartner and Jones 2009; Peters, 2019). Such forces could be considered as the critical junctures. Capoccia (2015, p. 149-150), develops the interaction between institutions and its exogenous environments observing that:

“The defining feature of critical junctures is not contingency but divergence: critical juncture analysis is appropriate in situations in which a “common exogenous shock” affects a set of cases (typically countries), causing them to “diverge” as a result of the combination of the common shock and their different antecedent conditions, which therefore exert a significant causal force on the outcome (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012, 106; Slater and Simmons 2010, 888; Soifer 2012, 1593)”

Hence, the relevance of critical junctures in HI is that they may initiate new developments that would not have occurred without such junctures. In summary, the effects of the critical junctures can have long lasting effects in the institution. This process refers to the second concept of HI, called dependency. According to Farrell (2018, p.33), “path dependence appeared to offer an account of how history mattered”. In this regard, an initial critical juncture moment can cause a change in the sequence of events, leading to different historical outcomes (Fioretos et al., 2016, p.9). In this way, the process of evolution of an institution is dependent on previous events.

Path dependence is often called a process where the feedback or outcome from an original policy choice reinforces the initial decisions (Peters, 2019, p. 89). Another definition is presented by (Capoccia, 2015, p.152) who states that path dependency refers to “mechanisms (increasing returns, network effects, lock-in, and others) through which institutional arrangements become entrenched by shaping their social underlay”. Whether it is called a process or a mechanism, it is noticeable that the dependency comes from the entanglement that initial actions have on the development of the institution.

Following this idea, Rixen and Viola explain that path dependence is a self-reinforcing process “because it is reinforced through variables endogenous to the institution. The institution has effects, which then become causes of subsequent effects, which in turn become causes once again, in an ongoing feedback loop” (Rixen and Viola, 2016, p.12). This “feedback loop” idea is basic for understanding the planning, implementation and adjustment of institutional policies. An institution observes a social issue (such as drug trafficking and the empowerment of DTOs) and creates and implements a policy, such implementation causes an effect in the issue. At the same time, the subsequent developments are observed by the institution who adjust the policy for its further implementation. In this way, the process is dependent on the previous path (decisions) initially taken by the institution as well as on the critical junctures that affect its development

Subsequently, the outcome of path dependency generates the continuity of the institution until its development is affected by change caused by critical junctures (Capoccia, 2015, p.147-148). Due to its magnitude and development within a brief period of time, such events cause a shock-effect in the institutions. At the same time, such shock provokes reactions from the institutions, meaning new decisions to adjust to the critical juncture. Such decisions end up being part of the path of the institution.

In this way, it can be said that path dependency and critical junctures are linked because the historical evolution creates paths and causes shocks. This analysis of path dependency and critical junctures lead scholars to question what initial choices did and did

not determine the evolution of the institutions. The acknowledgment that there were conditions that did not affected the path of an institution lead scholars “to consider not only the institutional path selected during the critical juncture but also the paths that plausibly could have been, but were not, taken.” (Capoccia, 2015, p.152). Observing the possible development of what could have been is a way in which we can analyse, in retrospect, the opportunity costs of past decisions.

The last concept is sequencing. For HI scholars, sequencing is relevant because in order “to develop explanatory arguments about important outcomes or puzzles, historical institutionalists take time seriously, specifying sequences and tracing transformations and processes of varying scale and temporality” (Pierson and Skocpol, 2002, p.696). In this regard, HI scholars such as Gerschenkron (1962), Kurth (1979) Shefter (1977) and Ertman (1997) observe that the timing and sequence of events are very important for the development of path dependant processes.

The idea of sequencing implies that the order of events and its precise timing will cause a specific reaction. Such reaction at the same time will cause yet another specific evolution of events. It can be said that by studying the sequence of events analysts and academics can understand why certain things and decisions happened the way they did according to the specific timing of things.

In summary, it can be said that path dependent processes are altered by sequencing of events as well as by critical conjunctures. In the words of Steinmo (2008, p.166), “acknowledging the importance of history suggests an explicit awareness that important variables can and often do shape one another.” In this regard, I argue that the consideration of history through the three concepts proposed by HI gives scholars an advantage to understand the present state of the international system because it allows a better consideration of how present circumstances had been built on the sequenced evolution of previous events in different institutions.

In terms of the evolution of DTOs, HI presents an alternative to observe and understand such criminal organizations. The argument here is that the Mexican cartels can be considered an institution of illicit nature, but an institution nonetheless. This consideration allows the application of the three main ideas of HI –critical junctures, path dependency and sequencing– to understand the growth and empowerment of the Mexican DTOs. In this way, the observation of the historical development of the cartels, and the identification of critical junctures, path dependencies and the specific sequencing of events, I was be able to observe if the Mexican DTOs are playing a relevant role in the cocaine trafficking to Europe or not. What is more, the application not HI allowed me to analyse how decisions taken in other institutions, like the implementation of specific security policies, play a role in the international expansion of the Mexican DTOs.

## **1. Historical Institutionalism and its possibilities for International Relations**

The introduction of HI in the discipline of International Relations is relatively new. In this regard, the work of Rixen and Viola (2016, loc. 174) is the first book that focused on examining IR from the perspective of HI. The authors present several arguments to explain why HI is a promising addition to International Institutionalism and scholars studying institutions in International Relations:

- The first argument relates to the attention that HI the evolving dynamics of institutions. It “pays attention to when and how historical processes shape institutional outcomes, it gives us tools to assess the legacies of founding movements, the consequences of new ideas and big events, the prevalence of incremental reform over one-off design, and the unintentional aspects of institutional formation and change.” (Rixen and Viola, loc. 153).
- The second argument is that the close observation of the characteristics and reactions of institutions allows for better understanding of endogenous changes and of the relations that such changes have with exogenous factors.
- The third one is related to the interactions between domestic and international politics. At this point, the authors note that the interaction between international actors in the international system is also normed by the constitution of the actor’s institutional composition at the national level (Rixen and Viola, loc. 153).

At the same time, the evolution of HI, as well as its focus in history and in the historical development of institutions could contribute to a broadening of understanding in International Relations. Similarly, Rixen and Viola (2016, loc. 396) elucidate that HI provides IR scholars with tools and conceptual resources like path dependency, to observe the dynamism of institutions both in terms of historical change and in its interactions with endogenous and exogenous factors. At the same time, HI includes the consideration of the relations of multiple national and international institutions to understand regime complexes.

At this point, the sequencing in the actions of states and its institutions at the national level is important because it has the capacity to alter the outcomes beyond the state borders, in regional and international developments (Solingen and Wan, 2016, p. 566). In this way, the sequencing of events in one institution is also linked to the sequencing and timing of events in other institutions. At this point, the use of sequencing combined with the identification of critical junctures and path dependence, have the capacity to be very effective theoretical tools when observing the creation, evolution and even failure of international institutions in the International Relations.

However, Zürn (2016, p. 201) observes that HI is not developed enough within the discipline of International Relations as to stand as a new paradigm. In this regard, the theoretical arguments of HI can be used in conjunction with other IR theories to create a better understanding of the international system. Zürn (2016) sustains that the attention to history emphasised by HI does not necessarily help to create reliable prospective IR analysis, hence the need to use it with other theories. However, I consider that the weakness in terms of prospective analysis may have to do more with the incipient theoretical developments of HI within IR, rather than its prioritization for historical analysis. My

argument is that by identifying and analysing critical junctures, path dependency and sequencing, IR can identify trends in International Relations that may repeat in history.

At this point, the possibilities of HI in the discipline of International Relations are as limited as our capacities to further apply the HI principles and concepts to analyse the international system. Theories and paradigms in social sciences are not developed overnight. They are constructed by scholars through the development of ideas and the evolution of the analysis. At this point, the contribution of Fioretos et al. (2016) is that it forms part of the foundations that may lead to the solidification of an independent HI theory in IR. What is more, as the international system evolves, national and international institutions are increasing their power to alter the international relations among states.

Considering the arguments mentioned above, my research applies HI to the study of transnational criminal actors in the discipline of International Relations. The research question inquires whether or not the Mexican Cartels are playing a relevant role in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. In the same way, my hypothesis claims that the international expansion of the cartels is linked to the counter narcotic policies implemented in Mexico, and the subsequent empowerment and expansion of the Mexican DTOs in the Americas. In this sense, the use of HI can help to identify the critical events that caused certain subsequent patterns in the growth of Mexican DTOs. At the same time this brings light into the factors that impact the institutional constitution of the Mexican DTOs, it can also help to understand the capacities and interests that cartels may have in Europe, hence helping to answer the research question.

In the same way, the use of HI can help to document how the two variables abovementioned, the counter narcotic policies and the empowerment of Mexican DTOs in the Americas, play a role in the international expansion of Mexican DTOs. At this point the observations of power through the HI are useful to understand the evolution of the cartels' international role. Pierson observes that "The examination of temporal process is central to the study of power, because power is something that develops over time and simultaneously becomes less visible as it does so." (2016, p.134). My initial observation was that the Mexican DTOs have transnational power in the Americas, and the objective is to understand if they are playing a relevant role in the cocaine trafficking dynamics to Europe. The examination of the temporal process will make it observable the relation between the historic evolution of the two variables and the empowerment of the DTOs. At this point, the combination with Institutionalism in IR became handy for a better understanding of the relation between the states policies, its effects in the international system and the influence that these have had in the evolution of DTOs.

### **3.2 Institutionalism in International Relations: International Liberalism**

This section explains the evolution of Institutionalism in International Relations. Its purpose is to observe how the development of the theory is also linked to the historical circumstances observed in the international system. This theory gives special consideration the role that institutions play in the evolution of the relations between states. Moreover, it

shows how the first and the second world wars were historic events that provoked further interest towards international cooperation. After presenting the historical evolution of the theory, this part concludes with a reflection about the current status of the international system and the need for theoretical evolution and adaptation in accordance to the current situations.

The emergence of Institutionalism is related to Liberalism as a theory in the discipline of International Relations, which has its roots with Thomas Paine and Emmanuel Kant (Rousseau and Walker, 2009, p.21). Both authors contributed to create the basis of what would become the theory of International Liberalism and from which further sub theories as International Institutionalism would derive. Paine's main work, *Rights of Man* was published in 1769, and by the time Kant published *Perpetual Peace* in 1795, Paine's work was an international bestseller (Walker, 2008, p. 454). Paine (1999, p.98) supported the idea that democracy could be spread by revolutionary movements. Revolutions would put an end to monarchic governments in the European countries and the instauration of republicanism would make Europe a more peaceful region.

Even when Paine's work presented the expansion of republicanism as a way to reduce conflicts, in the academic community of international relations, the influence of Kant surpassed Paine's originality. The academic debate of Liberalism in International Relations has been historically more influenced by Kant's *Perpetual Peace* (Walker, p.451; Navari, 2008, p. 29). His three Definitive Articles 1) "The Civil Constitution of Every State Should Be Republican" 2) "The Law of Nations Shall be Founded on a Federation of Free States" and 3) "The Law of World Citizenship Shall Be Limited to Conditions of Universal Hospitality" (Kant, 1795, p.120-137) had been of particular importance to the development of the liberal tradition. His concept of a federation of states would be a confederation rather than a world state (Russet, 2010, p.96) which means that each state would still be sovereign.

Kant defends the sovereignty of each state postulating that no state can interfere in another state (1795, p.112). Under this idea, each state chooses rationally their best interests, and part of these interests are related with commerce. According to Kant, the development of commercial relations would reduce the likelihood of war and it would favour international cooperation. At this point, the evolution of commerce would interlink the different states, increasing the cost of waging war against each other.

However, while commerce would increase favourable relations between states, the balance of power played a special role in the defence of the sovereign state system. The balance of power focused on the capacities that states had to wage war against each other. If one was observed to increase its defence capacities, other states could create alliances to ensure their survival in case of conflict (Nye, 2007, p.88). This situation came to an end after at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the devastating results that the Great War had in the different countries of Europe made the balance of power something unaffordable, pushing the countries towards collective security. At this point, Nye (2007, p. 89) explains that the concept of collective security focused on the attitude of the state and not its capacities. It proposed that when a state was aggressive towards its peers, all the other states would ally against the aggressor.

The occurrence of the Second World War led to a rethinking of international relations theories. At this point, realist authors like Lawson (p.208) developed critiques to the “utopianism” of liberalism. Furthermore, the liberal arguments diverged from state-centrism. The new perspectives observed that the international system was becoming more flexible, and that the permeability of boundaries was blurring the distinction between the domestic and the international spheres. This process led to the development of new types of liberalism, such as neoliberalism and International Institutionalism.

In relation to the aforementioned, Ikenberry (2001) noted that after the Second World War the states were more committed to the creation of international institutions. The emergence of international institutions, such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, as well as of the European integration processes, brought additional attention to the way these institutions were shaping international relations. The study of such institutions, as well as of regional integration, became known as neoliberal institutionalism (Smith et al, 2009, p.203).

At this point, the use of the word “institution” was also part of the evolution of the new liberalisms after the Second World War. Early neoliberal authors used the term “international regimes” to refer to what we now call “international institutions.” For example, Krasner presents a definition of international regimes that considers the structure of how an international regime works. According to him, a regime has a set of “principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actor’s expectations coverage in a given area of international relations” (Krasner, 1983, p.2) As explained by Smith et al. (2009, p.203). In the aftermath of the Second World War, the concept international institutions referred to “concrete entities with a physical presence—names, addresses, and so on.”

The term “regime” was later changed to “institution” because it allowed scholars of international relations to connect with those studying economic institutions (Smith 2009, p.4). The evolution of new liberalism meant also the evolution of the concept from formal institutions to a broader idea that included the norms and rules that shaped social behaviour. As a consequence, the broadening of the concept allowed for a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of international relations and the furthering of Neoliberalism and Neoliberal Institutionalism.

In furthering this idea, Kauppi and Viotti (2019, p.72) sustain that the work of Burton (1971) and of Keohane and Nye (1972) were fundamental for the new theoretical developments. Burton (1971), critiqued the concept of international relations to refer to the relations between sovereign states explaining that there may be many nations in one state. He acknowledges that international relations include world-wide relations between actors that are not the state. For that reason, he argues that the term world society is better to refer the interactions between different actors in the global context. He sustains that the world society is better understand through a cobweb model in which there are many actors. He also explains that there are systems that are configured by actors that had established transactions and linkages.



The power to influence the international relations is a relevant characteristic of the actors in the international system. At this point, I agree with (Kauppi and Viotti, 2019; Lawson) about the contributions made by Keohane and Nye, (1977) in terms of the relation between actors and power. According to the authors, power is understood as the “ability of an actor to get others to do something they otherwise would not do (and at an acceptable cost to the actor)” (Keohane and Nye, 1977, p.11). Power is related to interdependence through the asymmetries between actors which gives one actor influence over the other. In this way, dependency is understood as being subject to influence from external forces.

Keohane and Nye (p.192) explain that International Relations is also shaped by foreign policy goals. Each state has multiple goals which are prioritized and that seek to maximize power. In this pursuit of different interests, the authors challenge the relevance of military forces, observing that in some cases, military forces are useless because war is not an option. Following this idea, they state that the interaction between states should not be seen as a “zero sum game.” Engaging in a zero sum means that if one actor wins, the other loses. Hence, they present the idea that asymmetric dependency may provide asymmetric winnings for both actors.

There are other authors that develop the idea of the interdependence between actors. Krasner (1983) presents the relevance that the dependence between transnational and trans governmental actors have for the international system. He maintains that such interdependence had an important relation to the development of economic and commercial relations between states. Historically, as economic ties between governments grew stronger, the power of politics was diminished.

In this regard, Mearsheimer states that realist logic is awakened “in a liberal world of liberal states because they have no intention of attacking each other, they no longer have to worry about their survival, and so, need not compete with each other for power. (Mearsheimer, 2018, 5:08) A different example of interdependence is Doyle’s (1983) idea of a “democratic peace” thesis, which proposed that democratic countries do not go to war against each other. The ideas that democratic countries are stronger and more peaceful than non-democratic countries had been supported by other authors (e.g. Russett, 1996; Barkawi and Laffey, 2011). However, there are remarkable similarities to the ideas of Kant and Paine presented earlier that republican states would be more peaceful.

Keohane (1984) present a deep explanation of cooperation among states. According to him, “intergovernmental cooperation takes place when the policies actually followed by one government are regarded by its partners as facilitating realization of their own objectives, as the result of a process of policy coordination” (1985, p.51-52). At this point, the objectives of each government matter to increase or decrease cooperation.

The theory of Institutional Liberalism is not sustainable when state elites do not observe self-interest benefits in cooperation. However, when such actors observe a benefit in cooperation, it can be expected that state will work to create international institutions (Keohane and Martin, 2004, p.41-42). In this way, states invest in the institutions because they have an interest in doing so.

Similarly, the changes in the institutions are related to the interests and expectations of the people. Keohane, explains that "institutions change as a result of human action, and the changes in expectations and process that result can exert profound effects on state behaviour" (1989, p.10). This understanding emphasizes first, the role that individuals can have in the international system; and second, the role that preferences and expectations have in international institutionalism. As explained earlier in this section, preferences of political actors are a relevant factor that shapes political outcomes.

In this regards, my thesis observes the DTOs as institutions where the decisions of drug lords can shape not only the evolution of the institution, but the role that the organization has at the international level. These observations come from cocaine trafficking into the United States. As observed through the literature review (Bagley, 2011; Mejía and Restrepo, 2014; and Langton, 2012), the initial participation of Mexican DTOs in cocaine trafficking necessarily involved an agreement or alliance between the leaders of the Mexican and Colombian DTOs. Observed from the perspective of Institutional Liberalism, it could be said that the interest of the drug lards shaped their international cooperation, shaping the international activities of their organizations.

While IR scholars could say that DTOs are not international institutions, my argument is that IR needs to adapt to the international developments of the time. Even when it is state-centric, , even when Liberalism focuses primarily on the states, the attention that Institutional Liberalism pays to institutions makes it a "user friendly" theory to consider and study alternative international institutions like the DTOs. Furthermore, in Institutional Liberalism, the perceived role and influence of institutions has also changed overtime. Keohane and Martin (2004, p. 46-47) observe that "Early research by institutionalists focused on institutions as dependent variables, examining the conditions under which they are created. Recent research has sought more systematically to demonstrate that institutions are sometimes significant for political outcomes, and to determine the conditions under which this is the case". At this point, the latest efforts of institutionalism in the field of International Relations seek not only to observe institutions as dependant variables, but as independent variables with the capacity of altering the interactions among states.

The consideration of institutions as dependent and independent variables widens the consideration of our appreciation of international relations. Recognizing that an institution has the capacity to be an independent variable in the evolution of the international system is recognizing that the state can be exogenously affected by international institutions. In other words, it is recognizing the idea that international institutions have enough importance and power of influence as to affect the states. What is more, it brings Institutional scholars a step closer to Historical Institutionalism.

In conclusion, it can be summarized that although it is still state-centric, the new Institutional Liberalism is inclusive of international institutions. (Baldwin, 1993, p.3). By having institutions that lead the actions of the state, such institutions can work towards the improvement of the human condition avoiding conflicts among states (Keohane, 2012, p. 127). What is more, new institutionalism accepts that anarchy poses a challenge in the

international system, but argues that states benefit from cooperation, being assisted by international institutions (Grieco, 1988, p.485; Sterling, 2010, p. 117).

At this respect, it is important to observe that the legitimacy of the United Nations as an international institution with the capacity of influencing international outcomes has been a long process that can be traced to creation of the League of Nations after the first World War. Through history, Institutional Liberalism has been state centric, but it is also adapting to the international circumstances and the increase of international governmental and non-governmental organizations. My argument in this regard, is that the observation of illicit international groups should be considered in the new theoretical developments of Institutionalism in International Relations.

Under current circumstances, focusing on the evolution of criminal groups in the international level, one can contest the extent in which the cooperation through international institutions have helped in diminishing the power of modern international illicit groups like the DTOs. In other words, even when there is more cooperation, the problem remains relatively unaffected. Furthermore, Institutionalism in International Relations fails to make an explanation about the international issues rising from the interaction between Organised Criminal Groups (OCGs). Although it considers the role of international institutions and their influence in the behaviour of states and world politics, it does not consider to what extent non-state actors of illicit nature –like DTOs– can affect the evolution of the international system.

In this regard, following the ideas presented by Burton (1971) one can argue that in current times, transnational illicit groups, like criminal organisations and terrorist groups, are actors with the capacity of affect the international interactions between states. Some examples of these would be the international cooperation between the U.S. and the Latin American countries as a reaction towards the increasing transnational problem of drug trafficking and DTOs during the 2000s; and the international alliance against terrorist groups like Al Qaida during the 2000s, or against the growing power of the Islamic State in the 2010s.

My argument is based on the application of Moravcsik's (1997) assumptions of the liberal theory mentioned earlier. DTOs have the capacity of influence state preferences towards international cooperation and hence, change international politics. For example, the fight against drug cartels have led to countries like Colombia, to allow the presence of U.S. security agencies for advisory and aid against trafficking organizations (see GAO 1993). The increasing interest of countries to cooperate between each other against DTOs reflects the increased power that the DTOs are having in shaping the international interests of the states.

Moravcsik's (1997) second assumption stated that the state represents the interests of the society. However, DTOs also cover the interests of illicit groups within the society and brings economic opportunities to marginalized sectors that would not achieve development through state policies. In this regard, Dion and Russler (2008) present an example how poverty and coca cultivation have a non-linear relation. In other words, the coca cultivation is an economic alternative to the marginalized sectors of the rural society

in Colombia. Hence, DTOs are taking advantage of the needs of those parts of the society that had been left behind.

It can be argued that the collaboration between states against the growing power of illicit actors is something that has created interdependence among states in some regions. For example, in the Americas, the U.S. leads the efforts against DTOs, but it has cooperation agreements with many countries in the region, generating an interdependence between all the national institutions engaged in the fight against DTOs. In other ways, the increasing transnational capabilities of drug cartels is incentivizing states to cooperate, increasing the interdependence among them.

From my perspective, the consideration of illicit groups as actors in the international systems is a necessary step in Institutional theory in International Relations. The power of some illicit groups has increased enough as to alter the action and international interactions of the States, generating major interdependency. Widening the perspective to consider transnational illicit groups as actors in the international system would allow to observe them not only as threats to the state, but it will permit a further consideration of their behaviour in relation to their long-term interests and their interaction with other illicit groups in other countries and regions. Instead of being constrained to consider criminal organizations, like DTOs, as national and international security threats, considering them actors that are similar to institutions in the international system allows for further analysis on how these actors manipulate or react to achieve their transnational illicit goals.

### **3.3 The combination of Historical Institutionalism and Institutionalism in International Relations to observe the DTOs.**

This thesis combines the theoretical perspectives of HI and IR Institutional Liberalism to observe the evolution and international roles of the Mexican DTOs. While the past two sections explained the theoretical evolution of both theories, this section presents how both theories can be combined to understand and analyse the phenomena of the transnational expansion of Mexican DTOs; and in particular, clarify the role that the DTOs are playing in the cocaine routes to Europe.

The theoretical contribution of HI is that it allows to through the identification of the critical junctures, path dependencies and sequencing, it is possible to have a deep comprehension of what has shaped the composition of an institution. Earlier in this chapter I argued that DTOs could be considered institutions; this consideration is based on the constitution and characteristics of the Mexican cartels, particularly the Sinaloa, the Gulf and the Zetas cartels. Through the application of HI, I analyse the historic evolution and characteristics that shape the current profile of each of Mexican DTOs selected for this case study.

By observing the history of the cartels I identified critical junctures, path dependencies and event sequencing. These process helped me explain the international expansion of the Mexican DTOs, in which ways and where. Furthermore, this historical observation allowed me to analyse how the two independent variables mentioned in the hypothesis, the counter narcotic policies implemented in Mexico, and the growing power of

the Mexican DTOs in the Americas had interacted between each other and how they may have altered the transatlantic aspiration of the Mexican cartels.

In other words, by identifying what events shape the first international expansion of Mexican DTOs, I will be able to better analyse if the Mexican DTOs are really expanding to Europe and observe how has this expansion been shaped. In this respect, the use of HI is particularly handy to create a solid historical analysis to identify causes and effects, as well as to link different historical variables. Once this part is developed, I will proceed to the application of Institutionalism in International Relations to observe the role that the Mexican DTOs play in the international cocaine trafficking.

In this regard, when I apply Institutional Liberalism, I am recognizing that the Mexican DTOs to be analysed in my case study, have developed overtime to become actors within the international system. In my view, recognizing the DTOs as actors does not minimize the role of the State as the main actor of the international system. At this point, I am not that by considering these illicit groups as actors in the international system the States are moving away from the center of the processes of international relations. I sustain that the State has the main role in the evolution of DTOs. Through political decisions and the implementation of counter narcotic policies the actions of the state represent independent variables that affect the evolution of the cartels.

Hence, recognizing the DTOs as actors helps to understand the relation between the counter narcotic policies implemented since the 2000s in Mexico and the expansion of the Mexican DTOs to other countries. At the same time observing and analysing the international interests of Mexico's drug lords, as well as their inclination to cooperate with their counterparts in other countries through the lenses of Institutional Liberalism provided me with tools to observe the international expansion of DTOs through a new light.

## **Chapter 4 Mexican cartels and their evolution 1980s-2000s**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The main aim of my research is to clarify the role that the Mexican cartels play in the cocaine route to Europe. In this relation, the present chapter has two main purposes. On the one hand, it explains the origins characteristics and historic evolution of the Mexican DTOs that are the units of analysis of my thesis, the Sinaloa, the Gulf and the Zetas cartel. On the other hand, it observes that the LEA and the Mexican counternarcotic strategies had in the evolution of the cartels. For this reason I decided to divide this chapter into two parts.

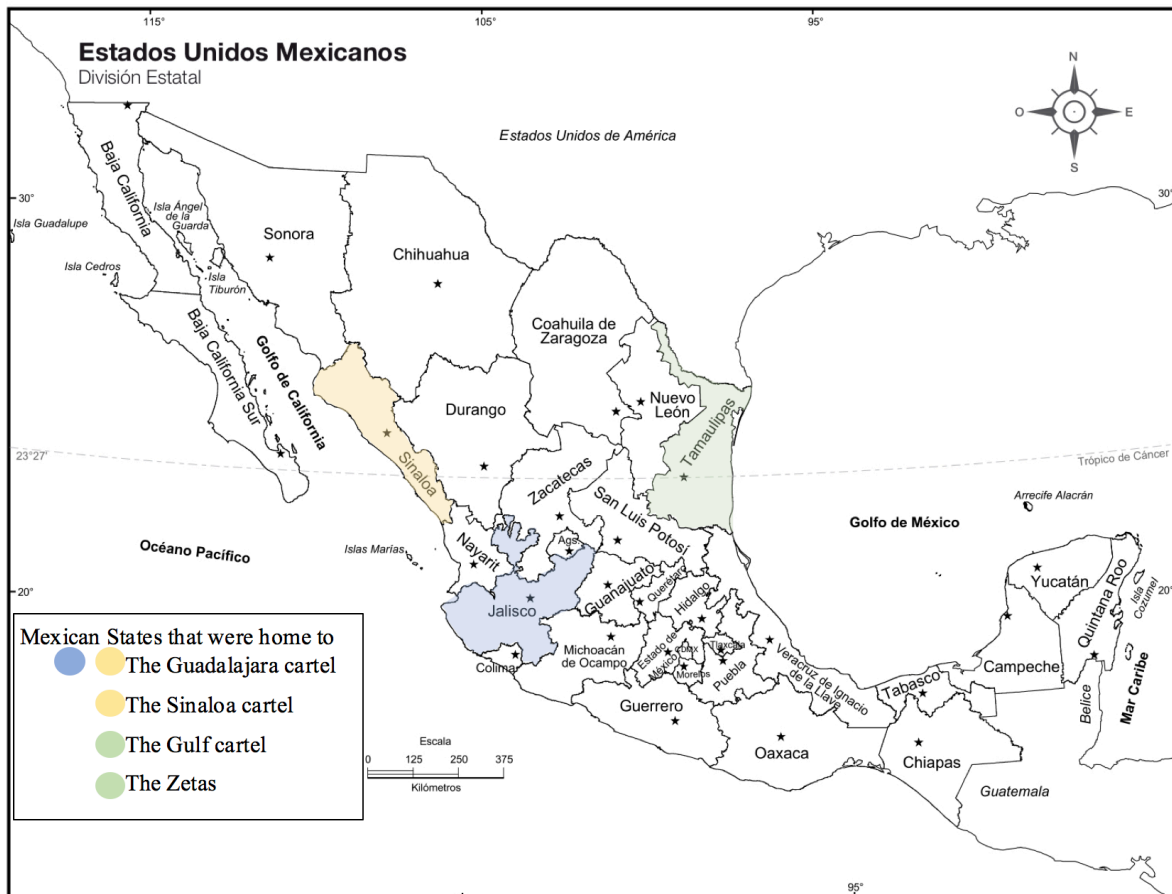
The first part focuses on the origins, evolution and characteristics of the Mexican cartels that are the units of analysis of my case study, the Sinaloa, the Gulf and the Zetas cartels. Considering the role that path dependency could play in the evolution of the DTOs, this part includes an explanation about the Guadalajara cartel as the ancestor of the Sinaloa Cartel. Furthermore, following the theoretical propositions of Historic Institutionalism, I identify the critical junctures that affected the evolution of the DTOs. In the same way, I analyse the sequence of events that contributed to shape the characteristics of each of the DTOs that are of interests to my research. In this first part, I triangulated my sources to provide a more accurate explanation of the evolution and characteristics of the Cartels in question. I used the answers given by the SMEs, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) documents about the Mexican DTOs and their leaders and the testimonials given in the trial of Joaquín Guzman Loera, the leader of the Sinaloa cartel.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the Mexican security institutions and counter narcotic policies. It acknowledges the corruption relations between members of the Mexican LEAs and the DTOs. It analyses the involvement of the military, the Federal Direction of Security and the Justice System. Then it presents an explanation of the Mexican counternarcotic strategies implemented during the administrations of Presidents Fox, Calderon and Peña (2000-2018). The sources for this part were the explanations given by the Mexican SMEs interviews from this thesis. It is important to clarify that I also used some academic and official sources as a way to support the information provided by the SMEs. In this regard, the understanding the evolution of the counternarcotic policies in Mexico is vital before proceeding to observe the relation between such policies and the perception that the cartels have a main role in the transatlantic cocaine routes.

In the third part of this chapter is a brief analysis about the role of violence and impunity. The purpose of this part is to explain how the different peaks of violence have a relation to different specific events in the evolution of the DTOs. What is more, it also presents an explanation about the conditions lived by the LEAs at the time of deciding the strategies about the War on Drugs and the deployment of the Mexican armed forces in different states of Mexico. The evolution of the different peaks of violence are also a demonstration of the evolution of the power that the Mexican DTOs had in Mexico. The information that I used to observe the violence in Mexico was sourced from the National Institute of

At this point, Figure 4 shows the map of Mexico indicating the states that were home to the main cartels that are studied in this thesis. The map is important as a reference of the places in which the Mexican DTOs developed their activities. Furthermore, it is important because it shows how far was each Cartel from the Mexican-U.S. border. Understanding the geographical location of each DTO is vital to understand the advantages that each of them had in terms of drug trafficking to the U.S.

Figure 4 The Mexican states and the cartel's headquarters



Source: Retrieved from INEGI and modified by the author.

## 4.2 Origins, evolution and characteristics of the Mexican cartels.

### 4.3 The father of chaos: The Guadalajara Cartel

#### Origins of the Organisation

The Guadalajara cartel is of great importance in the history of Mexican DTOs. It can be argued that it was this group who introduced the massive cultivation of marijuana in the north-western parts of Mexico and established the country as a transshipment point for the cocaine that was trafficked from the Andean Region to the U.S. Furthermore, its fracture at the end of the 1980s gave birth to most of the DTOs that monopolised the flow of drugs to the U.S. in Mexico during the 1990s, including the Sinaloa cartel. Hence, by observing the history of the Guadalajara cartel, I identified critical junctures that framed the path dependency for the Sinaloa cartel.

The Guadalajara cartel has its origins in Sinaloa, a state in Mexico with ideal climate conditions for the growth of marihuana and poppy. Some authors, including Langton (2013), trace the beginning of this DTO to Mr Pedro Aviles Perez, who also formed part of the security detail of Leopoldo Sanchez Celis, Governor of Sinaloa from 1963 to 1968. As expressed by Langton, Aviles Perez “is considered is considered by many to be the first true Mexican drug lord, after taking over his old family business which had begun with smuggling alcohol (and some marijuana) into the U.S. during the prohibition. He became Félix Gallardo's mentor” (Langton, 2013, loc.1066). Félix Gallardo took over the leadership of the organization after Aviles was killed by the federal police in 1978.

The name of the cartel "Guadalajara" came from the place in which the cartel based its operations after they moved from Sinaloa due to the military operation "Condor" (Valdez Castellanos, 2013; loc. 1563). Operation “Condor” focused on disrupting drug production during the mid-1970s (McCartney, 1985). The military efforts in Sinaloa were affecting drug trafficking activities because they were tackling the production of drugs and arresting drug traffickers. In turn the DTO sought fewer threatening conditions in Guadalajara where they could live and plan their business away from the pressure of the federal counter-narcotic operations.

### **Activities**

Since its creation, this DTO specialized in the trafficking of poppy and marihuana because both are easily grown in the north-western parts of Mexico. The beginning of the involvement of the Guadalajara cartel into cocaine trafficking started during the 1970s. There is no knowledge of the precise year it started; Astorga (1999b, p.188) traces the beginning of a trafficking partnership between Felix Gallardo and Matta Ballesteros (a Honduran citizen connected to cocaine traffickers) to 1975. Similarly, Hernandez, (2010, p.130), states that the cocaine flow started in 1977 when Felix Gallardo was introduced to Gonzalo Rodriguez Gacha, of the Medellin cartel in Colombia. Regardless of the precise year, it is agreed that Felix Gallardo had a link with the Colombians to smuggle cocaine.

### **Leadership**

The first leader of this cartel was Pedro Aviles Perez. However, with the cocaine arrangements, Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo emerged as the next leader of the organisation. Astorga (1999b, p.187) explains that Felix Gallardo’s previous background allowed him to become a dangerous criminal. He was born in Sinaloa in 1946, became a judicial police officer in the 1960s, and just as Aviles, he worked as policeman and as a bodyguard of governor Sánchez Célis. The political connections from Célis would have been handy at the moment of establishing the organisation (Warner, 2010, p.188). Moreover, being part of the police of Sinaloa, and working as part of the security detail of the governor should have given him tremendous strategic knowledge of the security conditions within the state, as well as the activities of the federal security forces.

In terms of leadership, I identified two characteristics that were particularly important for the strengthening of the Guadalajara cartel. The first one is Gallardo’s link to the legal authorities. The knowledge gained from his experience as a police officer would



let him plan better strategies to traffic the drugs, not only away from military operations, but also in a way that they could become “overlooked” by the authorities through the use of bribes. The second characteristic is his link to the South American cocaine traffickers. The revenues obtained from the cocaine business would have allowed his organisation to pay generous bribes to high level politicians and members of the federal security service, as well as to numerous members of the local police bodies. These two conditions would have allowed him to strengthen the cartel within the illicit world at the same time it created a network with the legal actors in Mexico.

In the 1980s, the expansion of the Guadalajara cartel was a process of associating with powerful landowners and/or local politicians which helped to prevent the rise of violence with the small drug seller competitor (Valdes Castellanos, 2013, loc. 1517). Having local landlords involved in the business was important because these people knew the geography of the region, making it easier to produce and transport the drugs. Another plus was that it facilitated the bribing of local authorities and law enforcers. In this sense, it can be said that the relationship between Felix Gallardo and Aviles with the political elite of Sinaloa –through the governor Sanchez Solis- would help the cartel gain contacts and immunity in the upper levels of the state government. At the same time, creating a network among landowners and local authorities would help to increase the power and influence of the DTO on the social structure of the state and, eventually, the federal authorities.

### **Evolution of the organisation’s corruptive capacities**

The evolution of the organisation is linked to drug-trafficking as well as the corruption of the authorities. The revenue from trafficking Mexican heroin and marihuana made it possible to establish a network of corruption with the legal actors; the addition of cocaine trafficking in the cartel’s repertoire represented a significant change in their corruptive power. As analysed by Chabat (2001), the tolerance that the governments had towards the DTOs was probably related to the economic crisis that was ongoing in the country. "Even when there are not reliable analysis on the volume and impact of narco-dollars on Mexican economy, some indirect indicators, like the real exchange rate of the peso, suggest the existence of a high flow of external money that has led to a *de facto* re-evaluation of the Mexican currency in 1992 compared to the 1983-1985, in part due to the drug money." (2001, p. 3) This makes sense because Felix Gallardo was paid with large amounts of cash at the beginning; nonetheless, the cash needed to be laundered, which meant an influx of money into the Mexican local economies that were devastated by the economic crisis.

However, as the business grew, Felix Gallardo demanded payment in kind. (Langton, 2013, loc.1103). This means to be paid with cocaine instead of money. It could be argued that the beginning of in kind payments is a critical juncture in the history of the Guadalajara cartel because it enlarged the power of the cartel inside the illicit world. The reason for this is because cocaine increases its value and provides major revenue once it has been trafficked to the U.S. and distributed in the American drug market. Apart from increasing its economic revenues, this also gave further power to Felix Gallardo as leader of the Guadalajara cartel because it allowed the DTO to establish its own cocaine

distribution network by using the drug trafficking channels established for marihuana. Furthermore, from this point onwards, the Mexican DTOs would have a special role in the cocaine routes to the U.S. This can be identified as path dependency, as the increasing returns of the payments in kind reinforced the interest of the Mexicans in the cocaine business.

A corroboration of these activities is observed with the indictment published by the U.S. District Court for the DOJ-Central District of California (1991). It states that under the leadership of Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo, Ernesto Fonseca, and Rafael Caro Quintero, the Guadalajara Cartel was dedicated to "the cultivation, importation and distribution of multi-ton quantities of marijuana in Mexico, the Central District of California, and elsewhere" and "engaged in the importation and distribution of multi-kilogram quantities of cocaine in Mexico, Colombia, Costa Rica and the United States" (1991, p. 2). The recognition of Costa Rica reflects the diversity of actors already engaged in the flow of cocaine to the U.S. Additionally, it implies the interaction, cooperation and coordination of multiple criminal groups in different countries.

While the cartel was becoming more powerful at this time, two critical events eventually altered the status quo of the Guadalajara cartel: a raid in Rancho Buffalo where Mexican and U.S. authorities destroyed 2,500 acres of marihuana in Chihuahua in 1984, and the torture and assassination of DEA special agent Enrique Camarena at the beginning of 1985. Both events are related because Camarena was the lead investigator of Rancho El Buffalo, and his death brought interest and pressure from the American authorities against the Guadalajara cartel.

The indictment released by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ-Central District of California, 1991, pp.13-14) reports that on February 7th, 1985, Special DEA Agent Enrique Camarena and the Mexican Pilot Alfredo Zavala were kidnapped and taken to Rafael Caro Quintero's residence in the city of Guadalajara, Jalisco, where they were tortured, interrogated and murdered. Apart from the Cartel leadership, the DEA also states the participation of the DFS commander, Sergio Espino Verdin as one of the persons who interviewed Camarena while being in Caro Quintero's house. In an interview with Esquivel (2014), Hector Berrellez explains that Espino Verdin was also present when Camarena was abducted. Berrellez was the DEA special agent in charge of the investigation of the Camarena's case, known as Operation Leyenda.

There are many versions explaining Camarena's death. Some authors (Langton, 2013, loc.1068; Mendel and Thoumi, 2014, p.203; and Astorga and Shrink, 2010, p. 35) explain that Camarena's assassination was related to his role as main investigator in a raid in Chihuahua. In another version, the DEA chief in Mexico said it was related to "Operation Padrino" that investigated Felix Gallardo and his associates (Astorga, 1999b, pp.188-189). Apparently, the members of the Guadalajara cartel were angry with the agent's activities and wanted to know how much Camarena knew about the cartel.

DEA Special Agent Berrellez mentions that Camarena's investigation pointed out that Mexican law enforcers and CIA personnel were involved in the trafficking of drugs; he states that U.S. "intelligence agencies were working under cover of DFS. Hence, as stated

before, unfortunately, DFS [Directorate of Federal Security] agents at that time were also in charge of protecting the drug lords and their monies" (La Jeunesse and Ross, 2013, Online.) Later in 1985, the Mexican Secretary of Government ordered the dismissal of the DFS. Berrellez (in Esquivel, 2014, p. 398) explains that when he brought the case to the U.S. authorities reporting the role of the CIA in the drug trafficking in Mexico, he was "punished by being dismissed" from the investigation and sent to desk-job in Washington DC.

### **The implications of the Camarena Case: a sequence of critical junctures**

It is important to understand the implications of Camarena's death. This case shows the role that both countries' authorities had in drug trafficking in Mexico. My argument is that the event is significant in several ways. Firstly, the presence of Camarena shows that during the 1980s the DEA had field agents working in Mexico. The fact that the DEA had its own personnel working in the field demonstrates the early concern of the U.S. authorities had towards the expansion of drug trafficking in Mexico. Furthermore, it could also demonstrate a lack of trust the U.S. government had towards the Mexican authorities. This was based perhaps on the assumption or proof that local authorities or the DFS were involved in illegal activities, and Mexican intelligence could not be trusted. Another possibility is that there was a lack of capacity of the legitimate Mexican authorities to deal with the situation.

Secondly, the kidnapping of Agent Camarena represents an important critical juncture in the behaviour of the cartel and their relation to the authorities. Regardless if this was planned as revenge for the Buffalo Ranch episode or in relation to "Operation Padrino", it could signify that the power or perception of the power of the Guadalajara cartel had grown to the point that at least part of the leadership of the organisation felt comfortable enough to kidnap a U.S. agent. Additionally, if the abduction was perpetrated with the help or by interests of the DFS and/or the CIA, it shows the interests and interference of the intelligence agencies in the drug trafficking business.

Lastly, the way both countries handled the investigation of the Camarena case shows bilateral disagreements. This can be observed with the abduction of Dr Humberto Alvarez Machain in 1990. As stated in the investigations of the DEA, Dr Machain injected Camarena with stimulants to keep him awake during his torture. U.S. authorities "were frustrated by Mexico's failure to arrest Machain after his earlier indictment in Los Angeles. Thus, American officials hired Mexican bounty hunters to kidnap Machain and take him to El Paso, Texas." (DEA, n.d.C, p. 87) The Mexican discontent with U.S. authorities increased after the U.S. court ruled that the abduction had not violated American Law. The subsequent pressure by the U.S. authorities lead the Mexican LEAs to arrest two of the three leaders of the Guadalajara cartel the following year, and eventually, it led to the disintegration of the cartel. In a way, it could be said that the Camarena case was the beginning of the end of this cartel.

### **The demise of the Guadalajara cartel.**

I argued that the event of Camarena was a pivotal point between the Government and the Guadalajara cartel. Rafael Caro Quintero was arrested in 1985, in San José, Costa

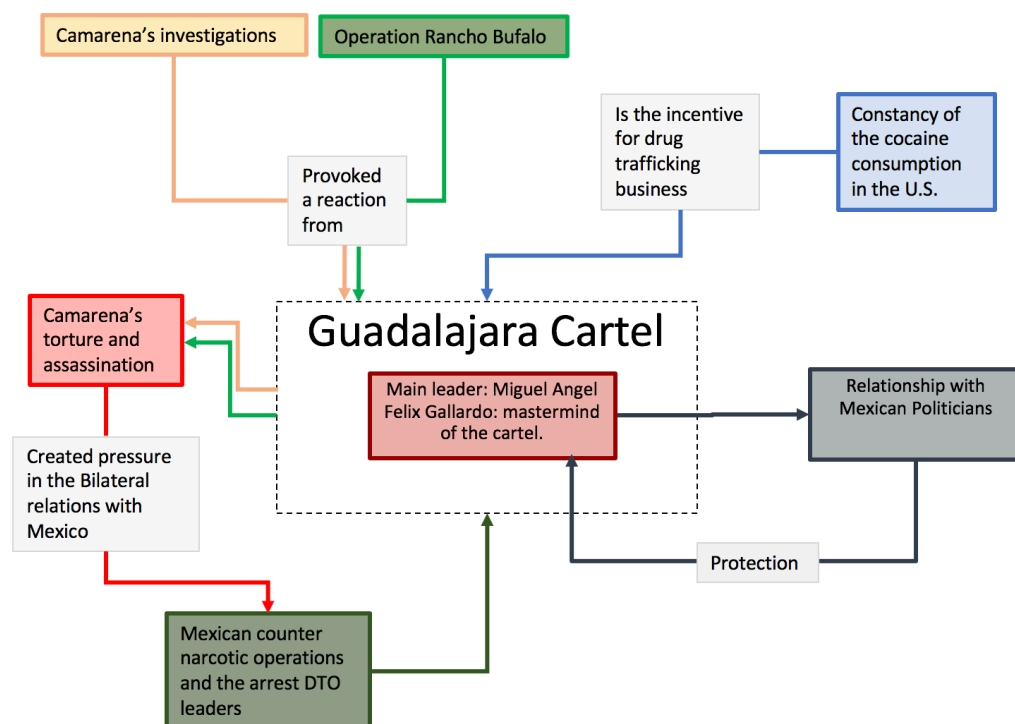
Rica shortly after fleeing Mexico (Excelsior, 2013, Online). Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo was arrested later the same year (Excelsior, 2016, Online). In their statements to the Mexican investigative authorities, both declared that they knew about the kidnapping, but denied participating in Camarena's death (DEA, n.d.B p. 64). Felix Gallardo was not arrested until 1989. Hernandez (2010, p.139) points out as a strange fact that Mexican authorities did not arrest Felix Gallardo when they arrested his two associates; she infers it is related to the main role the latter had as contact to Colombian DTOs that supplied the cocaine through Mexico to the U.S.

The reason as to why Felix Gallardo was not arrested cannot be deduced with certainty from the information available. However, retaking the multiple triangulation and the puzzle approach explained in Chapter 2, there are three main circumstances that can be considered as it can be observed in Figure 4. The first one is that the Camarena case required some action by the Mexican authorities against the cartel. The second one refers to the continuity of the U.S. demand for illicit substances. The third one is the role that Felix Gallardo played as leader of the DTO, he was the mastermind behind the supply of drugs. Therefore, the governmental authorities needed to punish the Guadalajara cartel due to the Camarena assassination. However, they did not take down Gallardo because it was in the best interests of the corrupted officials to keep the constancy of the drug flow to the US.

A crucial point to understanding the relevance of the drug flow relates to how we are interpreting the “results” of counter-narcotics strategies. In terms of the drug flow, the seizures of cocaine continued to increase, going from an annual average of 37 tons between 1989-1993 to an average of 46.9 from 1994-1996 (Astorga, 1999b, p.186). On the one hand, this could be observed as a better policy from the government who was paying more attention to the drug flow. On the other hand, this could mean that the illicit flow of cocaine remained unaffected and arresting Fonseca and Caro could have been an ineffective act of repression against the cartel following Camarena's death.

The year 1989 is particularly relevant in terms of critical junctures. The first one occurred when Hector Luis "El Guero" Palma, friend of Joaquín Guzmán Loera and one of Felix Gallardo's protégés, left the Cartel to establish his own organisation. As explained by Astorga and Shrink (2010, p.36), Gallardo would never forgive him. As revenge, Gallardo and the Arellano Felix Brothers (who would later lead the Tijuana cartel) killed Palma's family. His wife was seduced and later decapitated, her head was sent to Palma. His two little children were thrown off a bridge in Venezuela. This exhibition of violence was a clear message, against Palma and Guzmán. The importance of this event is that it created a deep enmity between Guzmán and the Arellano Felix brothers, provoking a war between both cartels during the 1990s.

Figure 5 The Puzzle Approach applied to the Camarena Case



Source: created by the author

The second event that shocked the drug trafficking system was the arrest of Felix Gallardo by the Mexican authorities in April 1989 (Herzfelder, 1989, p.9A). As stated by Guillermo Gonzalez Calderoni, a high-ranking member of the Mexican Federal Police, the General Attorney called him and asked him to capture the drug lord. It was a political affair related to the certifications that the U.S. was giving to other countries in their counter-narcotics efforts. Moreover, Gonzalez Calderon, explains that “If I [Gonzalez Calderoni] caught Félix Gallardo, then Mexico would be certified and if certification happens, then they forgive the debt. And if I don't catch him? The certification won't happen, nor will the debt be forgiven.” (in Frontline, 2000, Online).

Felix Gallardo's arrest was a major event because it meant the end of the Guadalajara cartel. Following his arrest, he divided the administration of the drug trafficking territory among his main traffickers, including Joaquin Guzman which became the leader of the Sinaloa cartel. The way the territories were divided included favouritism towards Felix's cousins, which caused further divisions among the different factions. As explained by Langton (2013, loc.1138) and Mendel and Thoumi (2014, p.204), the best trafficking routes, that passed through Tijuana (Baja California) into San Diego and Southern California were given to the Arellano Felix brothers and became known as the Tijuana cartel. The second-best routes linking Juarez (Chihuahua) with El Paso went to Amado Carrillo Fuentes who possessed an airplane fleet to trafficking drugs. His group became known as the Juarez cartel. Then, the area between Tijuana and Sonora was assigned to Joaquín Guzman and Ismael Zambada, that became the Sinaloa cartel.

A sequence of events can be observed specially between 1984 and 1989. The activities of the DEA agent Camarena lead to repressive actions from the members of the

Guadalajara cartel. The abduction and murder of Camarena was a major event because it unleashed unprecedented pressure from the US towards the Mexican authorities. This pressure eventually led to the arrest of the three leaders of the DTO. In turn, these events led to the division of the Guadalajara cartel, which gave birth to the multi-cartel system in Mexico.

### **The Guadalajara aftermath: the evolution of the multi-cartel system.**

The split of the Guadalajara DTO was followed by new counter-narcotics policies implemented by the new president Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994). Chabat (2001) states that Salinas changed the tolerance policy by implementing the following measures:

“a) budget dedicated to fight drug trafficking; b) seizures of shipments and eradication; c) police and military casualties in the drugs war; d) number of arrests; e) legal and institutional reforms in order to strengthen the fight against drugs; f) signing of international agreements; and g) acceptance of U.S. collaboration as well as the presence of DEA agents in Mexican territory” (Chabat 2001, p.8)

These new policies impacted the evolution of the criminal system by creating imbalances among the different groups that emerged from the division of the Guadalajara DTO. What this meant for the illicit system was a competition between DTOs for the control of cocaine flow coming from Colombia. Even when the cocaine flow is something relatively independent from how the system is distributed in terms of Mexican criminal groups, these groups compete to take advantage of shipping cocaine to the U.S. Therefore, if the policies of the new government weaken some cartels, the other organizations would take advantage of the situation to increase their criminal capability.

What is more, in the new system, each cartel acted differently in terms of violence and allegiances. During the 1990s, the Tijuana cartel of the Arellano Félix brothers was considered to be the most dangerous cartel. The Mexican General Attorney Office (PGR for its name in Spanish) stated that this DTO had the organisational, economic, and counter-intelligence capacities to cause social and political instability in Mexico (Pérez and Garduño, 1996, Online). The Arellano Félix brothers used murder as a tool against rival dealers, breaking with the tradition that murder was the last resort (Langton, 2013, loc.1203). An example of this proclivity to violence was the attack on the ZETA magazine founder Jesus Blancornelas by a group linked to the Arellano Félix DTO (Zeta, 2015, Online).

The central power of the Tijuana cartel came from the control of the border crossing in Tijuana, which gave them access to the distribution points in California. This ensured a constant flow of drugs and revenues, and these made it a target for the Sinaloa cartel. Both cartels were sworn enemies particularly after the assassination of Hector Palma's family. In addition, the trafficking territory assigned to the Sinaloa's cartel after the dissolution of the Guadalajara cartel in Tecate and Mexicali was far from the major distribution points in California. This caused the Sinaloa cartel to start to push west for access to better smuggling routes (Langton, 2013, loc. 1161). It could be argued that the offensive launched by Sinaloa

was a strategy to access the markets in the US and the violence was limited to the people involved in the business.

The conflict between both groups became a sequence of escalated violence. As stated in Darlin (1993), the outbreaks included the torture and assassination of six of Guzman's lieutenants, whose bodies were found in Baja California at the beginning of 1993. As retaliation, the Sinaloa cartel attacked a nightclub killing 12 people, targeting the youngest of the Arellano brothers, who escaped alive. The answer to this incident was a shootout at the Guadalajara airport that –by mistake- ended up in the murder of Cardinal Juan Jesus Posadas Ocampo. (Darlin, 1993, Online)

The assassination of the Cardinal was the next great critical juncture that altered the Sinaloa cartel during the decade. It occurred in a crossfire in the Airport of Guadalajara in May 24th, 1993 (Orgambides, 1993, Online). According to the authorities, the shootout was supposed to be an attempt by the Arellano Felix group against Joaquin Guzman (Bereño, 2009, Online). As explained by Albarrán (1993, Online) the fact that the arrested suspects were members of Californian street-gangs demonstrates that the Tijuana and the Sinaloa cartel were hiring members of U.S. street gangs to act as their assassins. This situation shows the international expansion of both cartels, which were already creating alliances with local U.S. criminals. This can be seen as another piece of the puzzle, as it demonstrates the international collaboration of criminals from two different countries.

Meanwhile, the Juarez Cartel, led by Amado Carrillo Fuentes increased its activities with his fleet of airplanes used to traffic drug into the US (Grayson, 2011, p.74). However, Carrillo Fuentes died in 1997 during a surgery in which he tried to change his facial appearance (Fineman, 1997). Amado's death represents a critical juncture for the drug trafficking dynamics in Mexico because it weakened the cartel. The vulnerable situation of the Juarez cartel during the 1990s was exploited by the Tijuana cartel who began a turf war for the control of the Juarez border point in Chihuahua, raising the levels of violence. As a way of fighting the Tijuana cartel, the Juarez and the Sinaloa cartels created a partnership during the 1990s (Ruiz, 2014, Online). This sequence of events are all related and shape the strategic mindset of the DTOs in terms of alliances and territorial expansions.

What is more, the relevance of the turf war led by the Tijuana DTO is a relevant event for my units of analysis is that they altered the equilibrium of the balance of power among cartels in Mexico. Due to its violent behaviour, the Tijuana organization became a target not only of the Sinaloa and Juarez cartel, but also of the authorities. In 2002, the Mexican authorities arrested the leading figure of the Tijuana cartel, Benjamín Arellano Felix which weakened the Tijuana cartel (House Committee on Homeland Security, 2006). The weakening of the Tijuana cartel represented an opportunity for the Sinaloa cartel that was fighting to expand its trafficking territory.

In parallel to the developments within the Tijuana Cartel, the death of Juarez's leader Amado Carrillo destabilized the system. During the 1990s, the Tijuana cartel and the Juarez cartel were strong and powerful due to their control of trafficking points in the border. However, as it was explained, both cartels suffered losses which meant an opportunity for other illicit organizations to emerge in the structure of power. These were the external

conditions that opened the gates for the Sinaloa cartel to become one of most powerful organisations of the 2000s.

#### **4.4 The Sinaloa Cartel**

##### **Origins of the Organisation**

The Sinaloa Cartel was one of the groups that originated from the dissolution of the Guadalajara organisation at the end of the 1980s. SME 3 explained that it was “funded by Hector Palma and Joaquin Guzman Loera in Culiacan, Sinaloa in the end of the eighties. After the apprehension of Hector Palma, Joaquin Guzman took the control of the organisation.” ((SME 6 (*pers.comm.*) 19 January 2018). Both men were part of the Guadalajara cartel until its dissolution. This background meant having experience in a variety of illicit activities, including trafficking cocaine into Mexico and to the U.S.; production and trafficking of heroin and marihuana to the U.S. and knowledge of the illicit network that permitted and protected the illicit activities of the organisation. I argue that this heritage was something that helped not only Sinaloa, but the other remaining organisations, to acquire power and control over the trafficking routes in the 1990s.

##### **Activities**

The Sinaloa cartel began as a trafficking organisation, partially inheriting operations from the Guadalajara cartel for the smuggling of cocaine, marihuana and heroin. SME 6 ((*pers.comm.*) 19 January 2018) explained that

“The cartel initiated controlling the marihuana and poppy crops in the Golden Triangle zone (region between the states of Sinaloa, Durango and Chihuahua), then expanded its criminal activities to the surrounding states and the US as a result of many battles against the rival cartels in order to control the trafficking of different drugs (cocaine, methamphetamine, heroine, marihuana) and weapons, until it was considered the principal criminal organisation in Mexico and the US.”

Although the cartel evolved since the beginning of the 1990s, the core of their activities did not change much. As stated in a recent indictment by the US Attorney’s Office from the DOJ-Western District of Texas (2019, para.8) the main activities of the cartel are

“to smuggle large quantities of marijuana and cocaine, as well as other drugs, into the United States for distribution. Laundered proceeds of drug trafficking activities are returned to Cartel members and are used in part to purchase properties related to the daily functioning of the Cartel, including real estate, firearms, ammunition, bullet proof vests, radios, telephones, uniforms and vehicles.”

In terms of the *modus operandi*, the evidence provided during Guzman’s trial confirmed the use of submarines, carbon fibre airplanes, trains with secret compartments and transnational underground tunnels (DOJ, 2019a) for the trafficking of drugs. Similar information is observed in the guilty plea of Jesus Zambada Niebla, son of the drug lord Ismael Zambada, who stated that the Cartel’s leadership coordinated the “import multi-ton quantities of cocaine from Central and South American countries, including Colombia and



Panama, to the interior of Mexico, using various means, including but not limited to, Boeing 747 cargo aircraft, private aircraft, submarines and other submersible and semi-submersible vessels, container ships, go-fast boats, fishing vessels, buses, rail cars, tractor trailers, and automobiles” (DOJ-Northern District Of Illinois Eastern Division, 2008, p.8).

This diversity in the techniques ensure a constant flow of drugs into the U.S. The relevance of the constancy and the variety in the supply of drugs relates to the continuous revenues obtained by the cartel, which allowed for the construction and maintenance of a corruption network with different actors in Mexico.

The new witnesses’ testimonials offered during Guzman’s trial at the end of 2018 and the beginning of 2019, show how the activities of cocaine trafficking were done under the leadership of Guzman. According to the Colombian drug lord Juan Carlos Ramírez Abadía, between 1990 and 1996 he sent about 200 tons of cocaine to the Sinaloa cartel from which 80 or 90 tons were directly sent to Mr Guzman (PROCESO, 2019, pp.18-19). During the 2000s, the drug was constantly brought from Colombia. Jesus Zambada García, accountant of the organisation and brother of the Sinaloa cartel leader Ismael Zambada, stated how he was aiding in the drug trafficking organisation between 2004 and 2008, when he sold to Guzman 13 tons of cocaine at a price of 13,000 USD (PROCESO, 2019, p.15). During the next decade, the Sinaloa cartel conducted business with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The evidence of such interaction was presented at Guzman’s trial as a recorded phone call between Guzman and a FARC member. The recording was made during May 2010, and in it the Mexican drug lord spoke of buying two tons of cocaine, ensuring it was a serious business partnership (PROCESO, 2019, p. 23).

## **Leadership**

The main leader of the Sinaloa cartel for more than 20 years was Joaquín Guzman Loera a.k.a. “El Chapo” (DOJ, 2019). He started out as a foot soldier in the Guadalajara cartel: he advanced within the organisation and "was coordinating aeroplane logistics for Felix Gallardo" (Astorga and Shrink, 2010, p. 36). Under his leadership, the cartel began a turf war against the Tijuana cartel for the control of the trafficking corridor. He was arrested in Guatemala in June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1993 and sent to Mexico (BBC, 2016) where the authorities sentenced him to jail where he remained until his escape in 2001. It was not clear whether he remained part of the leadership during his imprisonment.

The other recognized leader of the cartel is Guzman’s associate, Ismael “El Mayo” Zambada (DOJ-Southern District of California, 2013, p.1). He is characterised for having a low criminal profile, minding his own business and avoiding attention from the authorities or other criminal groups (Castillo, 2001). His importance to the Sinaloa cartel relates to his leadership role; he was believed to be the leader of the organisation while Guzman was serving his prison sentence (SME 28 (*pers.comm.*) 19 September 2019). What is more, Zambada never challenged Guzman’s authority nor did he tried to steal the organisation from him. This was confirmed during Guzman’s trial (Proceso, 2019) where there was no mention of competition or disagreement between both leaders. Both were part of the leadership and worked towards the expansion of the organisation.

On January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2001, Guzman escaped from a maximum-security prison in a laundry truck (Brito, 2014, Online). The escape was allegedly planned by his associate Ismael Zambada (SME 28 (*pers.comm.*) 19 September 2019). This gained Mr Guzman a legendary status, as he returned to the leadership of the Sinaloa cartel along Ismael Zambada García and Ignacio Coronel Villarreal (Dean, 2014, Online). However, in September 2001, the police arrested Arturo Guzmán Loera, brother of Joaquín Guzman Loera, who was also part of the cartel's leadership. Following Arturo's arrests, the authorities detained two members of the cartel, the logistics coordinator and the person in charge of Guzman's personal security (Castillo, 2001). This wave of arrests was interpreted as a great success by the Mexican authorities and a defeat for the cartel.

After the arrests, the Sub-Attorney General, Rafael Macedo de la Concha, commented that the "Sinaloa Cartel was totally decimated" (Castillo, 2001 para.4). Even when the authorities were optimistic about taking down the cartel, they did not capture Guzman until 22 February 2014. He escaped again on the 11<sup>th</sup> July 2015 through a tunnel made directly to his prison cell, and he was arrested on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 2016 (BBC, 2016) and extradited to the U.S. ten days later. Even when he was still in jail, at the moment of finishing this thesis (September 2019) the Sinaloa cartel, which was allegedly "totally decimated" in 2001 is still one of the most influential criminal organisations in Mexico.

### **Corruption Network**

The network of corruption formed by the Sinaloa cartel was presented by the witnesses at Mr Guzman's trial. Open source information from the testimonies showed how the Sinaloa cartel and Mr Guzman had relationships with high level personnel in the Mexican government. The retrieved statements are presented as follows:

The witness Jorge Milton Cifuentes Villa (Proceso, 2019, pp. 28-29) stated that the cartel bribed Francisco Morales Lechuga, General Attorney of Mexico between 1991 and 1993. The importance of Morales Lechuga as the General Attorney is that it is his job to prosecute crime and bring justice to the victims of crimes. The bribes to the General Attorney ensured collusion and impunity for crimes committed by the Sinaloa cartel. Furthermore, it is indicative of the level in which the criminal organisations are bribing not only the local authorities, but also members of the executive branch of the government that answer to the President of Mexico.

The witness Jesus Zambada García (Proceso, 2019, pp.12-17) declared that during the 2000s, the Sinaloa Cartel use to pay bribes to high level governmental and military personnel. The first mention was made by the witness was Gen. Toledano Sánchez who was commander of the 35 Military Zone in Guerrero, Mexico in 2004. Zambada García also declared that from 2005 to 2007 the cartel paid Secretary of Public Security, Genaro García Luna, as a way to get some help against the Beltran Leyva Organisation; and in 2005 the cartel paid Gabriel Regino, the person in charge of the Direction of International Affairs of the Secretary of Public Security of Mexico City.

The witness Jesus Vicente Zambada Niebla (Proceso, 2019, p.33) testified that some members of the Mexican military bodies were receiving money from the Sinaloa cartel. The

persons he mentioned were General Humberto Eduardo Antimo Miranda, the High Official of the Mexican Secretary of National Defence, Colonel Marco Antonio de León Adams and the chief of the Presidential Guard General Roberto Francisco Miranda Moreno.

In terms of their international corruption network, the US Department of Justice make public the results of an investigations that proved that Guatemalan politicians were conspiring to trafficking drugs with the Mexican Sinaloa cartel (DOJb, 2019). According to the US authorities, the Guatemalan presidential candidate Mario Amilcar Estrada asked for campaign financing, and in exchange he promised to benefit the Sinaloa cartel once he took office. This case exemplifies the powerful role that the Sinaloa cartel plays in Central America; the fact that a politician asked for help from this internationally known cartel reflects the powerful image and resources that it projects in the region.

### **Evolution of the Sinaloa Cartel and the Federation**

The Sinaloa cartel was a stable organisation during the 1990s, a period in which it entered inter-cartel fights against the other cartels left after the dissolution of the Guadalajara cartel. The periods that Guzman was in prison (1993-2001 and 2014-2015) did not diminish his role in the leadership of the cartel, and the organisation was stable trafficking drugs. However, when he got out of prison, he led violent offensives against rival organisations.

As stated in the report “C1/C4/ZC/03/ 40/50” by the Mexican National Center for Planning, Analysis and Information for the Combat of Crime quoted in Osorno (2010, p.141), after escaping prison, Guzman met in the city of Cuernavaca, Morelos, with other drug lords. The purpose of the meeting was to agree on the creation of a Federation of drug cartels to centralize the business and take control of the Gulf cartel territory. Under the new agreement, smaller cartels in Mexico joined the Sinaloa cartel in the creation of a “federation” in which they worked together towards greater efficiency in the trafficking of drugs to the U.S.

The creation of the Federation had an additional purpose. Correa Cabrera (2017, p.27) argues that the intention was to alienate the Gulf Cartel, which was growing in trafficking capacities and firepower with the creation of the Zetas as its military branch. This federation last until the end of the 2012 with the fracture between the Sinaloa cartel and its allies due to the escalation of internal conflicts.

### **Inter cartel conflicts between the Sinaloa cartel and its peers.**

The Federation was a powerful syndicate of DTOs capable of defying other powerful cartels in Mexico. However, history demonstrates that it was not a stable organisation. New evidence shows that two of the main DTOs of the federation, the Sinaloa and the Juarez cartels began hostile actions among themselves by the mid-2000s. An example refers to the assassination of Rodolfo Carrillo Fuentes, brother of the Leader of the Juarez Cartel. He was shot dead in September 2004 as he was exiting a movie theatre. A

witness in the trial of Joaquín Guzmán Loera<sup>2</sup> stated that Guzman Loera had ordered the Rodolfo's assassination and in retaliation the Juarez cartel killed Arturo Guzman, Joaquin Guzman's brother, on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2004 (Feuer, 2018). Arturo Guzmán was shot seven times by another inmate while he was fulfilling his sentence in the maximum-security prison of La Palma (González and Sevilla, 2005). The incident began a war between the Sinaloa and the Juarez cartel which spilled over to the population.

I consider this episode to be particularly important because it demonstrates the interaction between the licit world and the illicit world. It demonstrates that there were corrupted guards in the maximum-security prison, that allowed a weapon inside a compound housing the most dangerous criminals. It also demonstrates the power of the cartels within the prisons. If the guard was bribed, it meant that either the selection process of guards failed and the person was corruptible, or it meant that the person did not get enough legal remuneration as to refuse the bribe. If the guard was blackmailed, it meant that the system that protects the guard's identity was broken which speaks of a further structure of corruption with links between other members of the penitentiary system.

Furthermore, the method of the assassination is a message per se. This was not a random act of a fight between inmates, the victim was the brother of Mr. Joaquín Guzmán, leader of one of the strongest DTOs in Mexico. Arturo was part of the elite criminal world, which means that whoever killed him had nothing to lose or was offered protection of some sorts. At the same time, it shows the power of the Juarez cartel to introduce the firearm and hire a killer who would do it.

In February of 2005, 12 people were found dead next to the highway between Culiacán and Mazatlán in Sinaloa, being one of the first episodes of "mass violence" (El Universal, 2005). In March, the chief of the police of Nuevo Laredo, Dominguez Coello, was killed on the day of his appointment, allegedly by the Zetas (Grayson, 2008). This was a powerful statement from the drug cartels in Tamaulipas. Killing a police boss has a profound meaning, because 1) the chief of the police is in charge of the law enforcement body that works to protect public security; 2) it is a show of the fearless commitment to violence and the subsequent message of having enough power to ensure corruption and impunity.

In July 2005, Mr Guzman allegedly ordered the death of Julio Beltrán, from the Beltran Leyva organisation, former allies of the Sinaloa cartel. According to the witness in Guzman's trial, Julio disobeyed a direct order from Guzman and that outraged the drug lord (Feuer, 2018). This episode created enmity between both organisations which would lead to another inter-cartel conflict.

At this stage, the cartels were not only fighting each other, but they were openly challenging the local authorities in some parts of Mexico. The governability decreased dangerously, and this could be observed in the continuation of assassinations of policemen. Some examples of this can be seen in the case of the torture and assassination of Tijuana's

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<sup>2</sup> The transcripts of the trial will be sealed for a period of at least 5 years from the end of the trial. I could not get Access to those documents; however, it was possible to learn some testimonials from the journalists that attended the different sessions of the trial.

commander of the Federal Agency of Investigations, Jorge Alatríste (Martínez, 2007); the assassination of the Police Chief of Ciudad Juárez, Sacramento Pérez Serrano (EFE; 2019a); and the assassination of the Police Chief, Director of the Homicide Department of Jalisco, Carlos Alberto Rayas Rodríguez (EFE, 2019b). These three cases are a few examples of how the OCGs in Mexico attack police members with impunity.

At the same time, the cartels were taking advantage of the government's CTOC operations against rival cartels. In January 2008, the arrest of Alfredo Beltrán the leader of Beltrán Leyva organisation, was believed to be consequence of a betrayal from Joaquín Guzmán and a violent conflict started between both groups (Díaz, 2014). These conflicts were one of the factors that provoked an increase in the violence during that year.

It is relevant to observe how the activities of the Mexican LEA had the indirect effect of generating power vacuums in the criminal world. The arrest of Eduardo Arellano Félix in October 2008 weakened further the Tijuana cartel, allowing for a better positioning of the Sinaloa cartel against the Tijuana cartel. The arrest in March 2009 of Vicente Zambada Niebla, son of Ismael Zambada, leader of the Sinaloa cartel, weakened the Sinaloa cartel because he was extradited to the U.S. (DOJ, 2010). And the death in December 2009 of Arturo Beltrán Leyva, leader of the Beltrán Leyva Organisation, in a military operation carried out by the navy, weakened the organisation even further (Calderón, 2009).

What is more, Arturo's elimination by the armed forces represents a breaking point in the cartel-civilian relationship. During the press conference regarding the operation, the authorities announced that 3<sup>rd</sup> Petty Officer Melquisedet Angulo Córdova was killed in action during the operation. After his funeral, a group of gunmen broke into his house and killed Angulo's living relatives (Barboza, 2009). This episode became one of the first examples of unprecedented violence against the family members of the security community. It was a clear message of the power of the cartel and an example of the chronic impunity existing in Mexico.

This constant attack on the DTO elites impeded the establishment of long-lasting leadership and the possibility of inter-cartel peace agreements. This led to instability and the creation of different alliances. An example of this instability is observed in the alliance between a smaller group, cartel del Milenio, and the Sinaloa cartel. As stated by SME 15, the Milenio cartel specialized in synthetic drugs and it had a military branch called "Mata-Zetas" whose purpose was to kill members of the Zetas. However, the alliance ended when the points of contact between both organisations were arrested or neutralized by the federal security forces. Furthermore, the Milenio became an independent organisation that is today called Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (SME 15, (*pers.comm.*) 28 September 2018).

During the 2000s, the Sinaloa cartel took every opportunity to expand. As it can be observed, it went even against those cartels that participated in this Federación. The Federación, once composed of almost all the strongest cartels in Mexico, became a weak entity at the same time the Sinaloa cartel opened innumerable fronts. It can be observed a trend to take advantage of other cartel's weaknesses or loss of leadership by assimilating their territory and taking over their trafficking routes.

## Conclusion

Unlike the other cartels that split from the Guadalajara organisation, the Sinaloa Cartel has existed for three decades and is still one of the strongest DTOs in Mexico. Even when one of the leaders had been arrested several times and finally extradited to the U.S. the organisation does not show signs of diminishing its criminal powers. It can be observed that an organisation adapts to its circumstances, taking advantage of the events in the licit and illicit scenarios.

The attacks on other DTOs after the arrests of their leaders led to the destabilization of the criminal world. Nevertheless, in terms of the Sinaloa cartel power and structure it led it to be constantly enhancing their ballistic capacities. The progressive assimilation and the different and better located border crossings, refers to a clear strategy that allowed the DTO to improve and expand its trafficking business. These adaptation capacities, along with its corruption network and its shared leadership are basic characteristics that had allowed the Sinaloa cartel to survive thus far.

### 4.5 The Gulf Cartel<sup>3</sup>

#### Origins

The Gulf Cartel has its origins in the 1930s with Juan Nepomuceno Guerra, who trafficked alcohol during Prohibition from Tamaulipas to Texas (Lucio, 2015, Online). SME 6 ((SME 6 (*pers.comm.*) 19 January 2018) considers the Gulf cartel to be “the first Mexican criminal organisation that was funded in Tamaulipas, a Mexican border state with the US. It initiated with alcohol trafficking to the US and then shifted to drugs.” In the same way, Valdes Castellanos (2013, loc. 7256) explains that it was not until the 1970s that the organisation started its consolidation, then it gained special relevance during the 1980s when Guerra’s nephew, Juan Garcia Ábrego, started trafficking drugs to Texas.

#### Leadership

The first leader of the organisation was Juan Nepomuceno Guerra. During Nepomuceno’s management, the organisation was dedicated to counterfeit and smuggling of goods. When García Ábrego took the leadership during the 1980s, he established deals with the Cali Cartel from Colombia lead by the Rodriguez Orejuela brothers -enemies of Pablo Escobar and the Medellin Cartel- to start trafficking cocaine (Beittel, 2018, p.16; Correa Cabrera, 2018, p.44). Under his leadership, the organisation started its expansion from Matamoros to other parts of the border in Tamaulipas, including Nuevo Laredo. As expressed by Gilmour, this enlargement of "operations along the Pacific coast gave it greater access to cocaine shipments from Colombia, which tended to ship directly from the Pacific

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<sup>3</sup> The Gulf cartel and the Zetas are two illicit organisations that are intrinsically linked because one originated from the other. The leader of the Gulf cartel decided to create the Zetas as a military body of the cartel. For this reason, this section will develop the history of both units of analysis beginning with the Gulf cartel in parallel.

port of Buenaventura up the Pacific coast." (Gilmour, 2007, Online). This situation was partly aided by the geographical location of the cartel. Tamaulipas is a state with a border to the US and represents the closest point between the northern and the southern borders.

The organisation grew considerably during the decade. By the end of the 1980s, the drug trafficker was moving 40 tons of cocaine on an annual basis into the United States (Fineman, 1995, Online). As mentioned by Correa Cabrera, the strength of the cartel was due on the one hand to Ábrego's leadership capacities; and on the other hand, the participation of members from the political elite and law enforcement (Correa Cabrera, 2018, p.45). This relation between the legal and the illicit actors was a key element in the Gulf cartel as well as in the Sinaloa cartel during the 1980s.

García Ábrego led the organisation until 1996 when he was arrested and extradited to the U.S. This situation led to a power struggle between different members of the cartel. After Ábrego's arrest, the cartel had no stable leadership until 1998, when Osiel Cardenas Guillen and Salvador "Chava" Gomez became the heads of the organisation. (Valdes Castellanos, 2013, loc. 3547). The next year, in 1999, Osiel murdered his partner and become the sole leader of the cartel.

Described as a "young and ambitious hit man" (Medel and Thoumi, 2014, p.204), Guillen was the leader that made the cartel's presence stronger at the U.S.-Mexico eastern border. In the words of Gilmour (2007, p.2):

“Under Cardenas, the cartel reinforced its dominance, expanding further along the border and battling the emerging Sinaloa Cartel for control of ports in the Yucatan peninsula. Cardenas was arrested in Matamoros in March 2003 and imprisoned but continued to run the cartel for the next four years. At this time the Sinaloa Cartel began to pressure Gulf Cartel operations, forcing Cardenas to agree on a short-lived alliance with the Tijuana Cartel.”

Osiel Cardenas Guillen was arrested on the 14th of March, 2003, but he was able to exercise the leadership of the organisation from his prison cell (Beittel, 2018, p.16). At the beginning of 2007, Cardenas was extradited to the U.S. where he is now fulfilling his sentence. He was succeeded by his brother Antonio Cárdenas Guillen until he was assassinated in 2010 (Beittel, 2018, p.16). In terms of the cartel's leadership, after Cardenas was extradited, the cartel was weakened and the Zetas were already struggling for independence (Gilmour, 2007, p.4). SME 6 (*pers.comm.*) 19 January 2018) considers that after Cardenas' extradition, the Zetas refused to work under any other leadership and declared their independence. Hereafter, it can be observed that the loss of leadership weakened the cartel to the point that it caused the fracture between the Gulf cartel and their paramilitary branch the Zetas.

## **Cartel Activities**

The Gulf cartel has, since the 1980s, been a criminal organisation focused on drug trafficking. The drugs used to arrive via the maritime ports to Tamaulipas and by land through the Mexico-Guatemala border (Valdez Castellanos, 2013, loc. 3576). The drugs were also transported via airplanes through clandestine airports. Rafael Cardenas-Vela Jr.

(nephew of Osiel Cardenas Guillen) during the trial of Juan Roberto Rincon-Rincon (a former boss plaza boss in Tamaulipas) explains the drug trafficking of the cartel:

“While Plaza Boss in San Fernando, Tamaulipas, Mexico, Cardenas-Vela and the Gulf Cartel utilized landing strips in rural areas of San Fernando to circumvent Mexican military checkpoints and allow small airplanes to transport cocaine for eventual importation into the United States. Elements of the Gulf Cartel, including Rincon-Rincon, would receive the cocaine loads at warehouses set up by Cardenas-Vela. Rincon-Rincon’s involvement in these loads lasted for the duration of Cardenas-Vela’s control of San Fernando and the amount of cocaine transported was well in excess of 150 kilograms. In fact, Cardenas testified that each cocaine load that came from the San Fernando landing strips contained 500 kilograms of cocaine, the majority of which was destined for importation into the United States. Cardenas further testified that the 500 kilogram cocaine shipments happened on a monthly basis while he was in charge of San Fernando between 2004 and 2009” (DOJ-Southern District of Texas, 2012, para.5).

The information in Cardenas-Vela’s testimony explains how the drug trafficking activities followed a strategy to get the drug to the U.S. The organisation avoided military checkpoints while at the same time kept a constant flow of medium packages of cocaine. This is why the consideration of the innumerable amounts of drug shipments, and the diversification of routes and shipping points is so important. Because it allows to consider the magnitude of the drug trafficking business not in terms of money, but in terms of the adaptability of the DTO’s strategies and their logistics.

### **Corruption Network**

It was possible to track the link between the Gulf cartel and some legal actors in Mexico through past prosecutorial cases in Mexico and the U.S. The present section mentions selected examples that were confirmed as a link between legal actors and the Gulf cartel members. The source of the information came from unsealed indictments and documents from the U.S. Department of Justice courts in which Gulf members were indicted, and in some cases judged.

The first example involved the governor of the state of Tamaulipas, Tomas Yarrington Ruvalcaba. As stated in the indictment presented by the U.S. District Court of the Southern District of Texas, the Gulf cartel bribed Yarrington as part of the cartel’s corruption network. The bribes started in 1998 when he was still a candidate and “the payments continued during his six-year term of office as governor (February, 1999 - December, 2004) and after. During this time period, the Gulf Cartel illegally imported into the United States and distributed multi-ton quantities of cocaine and marihuana” (DOJ-Southern District of Texas, 2013, p.12).

The second example is the indictment referring Eugenio Hernández Flores, Tamaulipas Governor 2004-2009. Although there is no file available about all the charges, the U.S. District Court of the Southern District of Texas charged Hernandez “with conspiring to launder monetary instruments and aiding and abetting the operation of an



unlicensed money transmitting business” (DOJ-Southern District of Texas, 2015a, para.1). Although there is no direct link between the governor and the drug traffickers, the case is in early stages and considering he was Yarrington’s successor, there is a feasible possibility that the money Hernandez has been charged with laundering came from drug trafficking activities in the state.

The third example refers to the role of Rincon-Rincon in the organisation. As explained in the testimonies during his trial in the US, Rincon-Rincon started working for the Gulf Cartel at the beginning of the 2000s. He was a municipal policeman and at the same time he “assisted the Gulf Cartel in their drug trafficking activities as a police officer and also by selling narcotics and collecting a piso at local drug houses in Matamoros.” (DOJ-Southern District of Texas, 2012, para.4). His legal life was as a cop, while his illicit activities were as an intermediary for the Gulf cartel until 2011 when he left the organisation.

The last example is the one cited by Guillermo Gonzalez Calderoni<sup>4</sup>, former commander of the police in Mexico. Quoting an interview with Dillon (1996, Online) Gonzalez Calderoni expressed that “a major Mexican drug trafficker had told him of making large cash payments to Raul Salinas de Gortari during the presidency of Mr Salinas's brother, Carlos". The former director of the Drug Enforcement Administration's El Paso Intelligence Center, Phillip Jordan, declared that this information was similar to the intel the DEA had at the time about the cartel.

### **Evolution of the Gulf cartel**

During the 1990s the Gulf cartel benefited from the drug trafficking activities. At this point it is important to note that the implications of trafficking cocaine were that in order to transport it from the southern border to the northern border of Mexico, the cartel must have had a corruption network in three different states. This network was built during the 1980s and as reported by Calderoni (in Dillon, 1996, Online), it evolved during the following decades to include the participation of high level of governmental officers. This corruption network facilitated the cartel’s activities and aided the organisation in becoming one of the strongest DTOs in Mexico during the 1990s and the mid-2000s.

I consider that a parallel factor that aided in the evolution of the cartel was the location of the state of Tamaulipas, home state of the cartel. Geography was a positive factor because the US-Mexican border in Tamaulipas is the closest northern point to the southern borders of Mexico. The driving distance from the borders in the state of Chiapas to the northern border in Tamaulipas is as short as 1750km approximately. In contrast, the distance from the southern border of Chiapas to Juarez and to Tijuana is 2,900km and 3,000km. Additionally, the route to Tamaulipas involves the crossing of only two more states, Chiapas and Veracruz. This meant that in logistics the corruption network would need to be connected with the power elite of only three states as compared with any other routes in Mexico.

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<sup>4</sup> Gonzalez Calderoni was accused by the Mexican authorities of protecting the Gulf Cartel; he fled to the United States with a green card only days before the court ruled his detention. The reason why I consider his statement was the confirmation observed in the U.S. counterparts with Dillon’s interview.

The next critical juncture in terms of the cartel's evolution is observed at the end of the 1990s when Osiel Cardenas Guillen created a group of bodyguards by hiring deserters from the Mexican special forces, later known as the Zetas. This group was particularly important for the history of the cartel because it supported the expansion of activities of the cartel. During the beginning of the 2000s, the Gulf cartel continued its activities in the northeast states of Mexico, mainly Tamaulipas. According to Correa Cabrera (2018, p.47), with the aid of the Zetas, the group was strengthening its presence in the eastern part of Mexico. This territorial presence enlarged the cartel's strategic capabilities to traffic drugs, transforming it into a strong player in the national scenario.

At the beginning of the 2000s, the arrest of Osiel Cardenas is yet another critical juncture because it led to two significant outcomes. The first one was that his capture was perceived as weakness by the Sinaloa cartel. In this regard, Stewart (2012) explains that Joaquín Guzman wanted to take over the Nuevo Laredo trafficking points due to the connection to the U.S. 35 Highway. The second one was an allegiance between the Gulf and the Tijuana cartels. Cardenas was imprisoned in the same compound where a leader of the Tijuana cartel, Benjamín Arellano Félix, was serving time. As explained by SME 28, after Guillen's arrest, the Sinaloa cartel tried to take over the Gulf cartel's territory in the border of Tamaulipas (SME 28 (*pers.comm.*) 19 September 2019), just as it was attacking the territories of the Tijuana cartel. To counter Guzman's offensive, the Gulf cartel allied with the Tijuana cartel against the Sinaloa cartel (Insight Crime, 2017).

It could be said that this alliance between the Tijuana cartel and the Gulf cartel gave both cartels unprecedented strength because both controlled the most dynamic border crossings of illicit substances at the U.S. border. This meant they had a constant influx of revenue and access to weapons trafficked from the north. What is more, the Sinaloa cartel moved again against the Gulf cartel, this time fighting to control the state of Guerrero. This conflict between the Gulf and the Sinaloa cartels provoked an escalation of violence in the State (SME 28 (*pers.comm.*) 19 September 2019).

Under Cardenas' leadership the cartel was able to defend its territory partly because of the Zetas and partly because of Cardena's corruption network. In this regard, the corrupted network expanded strongly into the LEA. According to Thompson (2005, pp. para.17), "The Nuevo Laredo police department served almost entirely at his pleasure, federal law authorities said, helping not only protect the Gulf Cartel but also kidnapping and killing suspected rivals". In summary, although the Sinaloa cartel tried to take over the trafficking territory of the Gulf cartel, Cardenas Guillen had enough power to defend it.

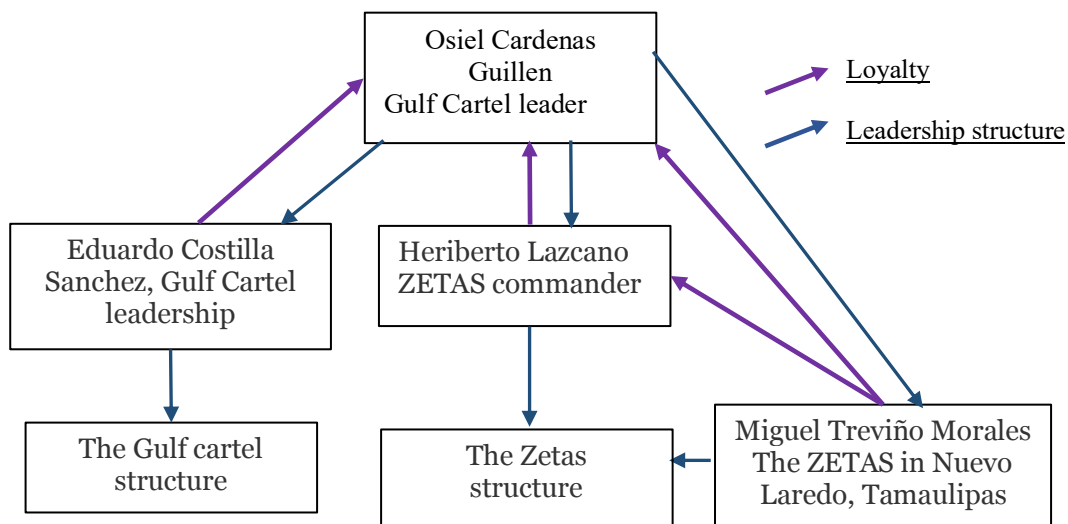
The war against the Sinaloa cartel in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, ended in 2006 when the Gulf cartel secured the control of the plaza and left the Zetas in charge of keeping its control. This gave the Zetas unprecedented power because they stopped being just the enforcement branch and went on to become part of the cartel's administrative activities (Correa Cabrera 2017, p.27). These events can be considered critical junctures that created a new path dependency for the Zetas cartel. What I mean is that the offensive launched by the Sinaloa cartel against the Gulf cartel caused that the later depended more and more in the Zetas as their security branch. The Gulf cartel invested in the growth of the Zetas as its

paramilitary branch. What is more, the power of the Zetas in Nuevo Laredo kept growing, and the city became the Zeta's headquarters when the group split from the Gulf cartel years later.

Additionally, during the year 2006 the Tijuana cartel (the Gulf's cartel ally) was debilitated by the arrest of one of its leaders, Javier Arellano Félix (DEA, 2007). This critical event was the beginning of a downward trend for the Tijuana cartel. The group started losing positions in Tijuana against the Sinaloa cartel and in 2008 the Federal Government began Operation Baja California, leading to the capture of Eduardo Arellano Félix (DOJ, 2013a), the last member of the Arellano Felix family. This weakening also meant that they could not be as strong an ally as they once were, which affected the Gulf cartel, as it could no longer count on the Tijuana cartel to help against other attacks.

The next critical juncture took place in January 2007 with the extradition of Cardenas Guillen to the United States. While Guillen was still in Mexico, the cartel had a hierarchical structure that followed his leadership. As identified by the U.S. authorities, Jorge Eduardo Costilla Sanchez was supposedly the first in command in the Gulf cartel (DOS, no date; DOJ-Southern District of Texas, 2017); Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano was in charge of the Zetas (DOS, 2017a); and Miguel Treviño Morales, was in control of the Zetas in Nuevo Laredo (DOS, 2017b). SME explained that after Guillen's extradition there was a dispute between Heriberto Lazcano, the leader of the Zetas and Eduardo Costilla. These was evidence that the organisation [The Gulf cartel] was disarticulating. These links can be graphically observed in Figure 6 about the Gulf's hierarchy and the partnership between the Gulf and the Zetas.

Figure 6 Leadership and Loyalty in the Gulf Cartel



Created by the author with information of the indictments published by DOJ-Southern District of Texas, 2012, 2013 and 2015.

My analysis is that the extradition of Cardenas Guillen affected the cartel due to three factors: He was a strong leader; he was the creator of the Zetas; and he had power over his organisation and corrupted law enforcement agents. These three conditions are entangled because leadership is highly linked with loyalty, and it is part of what binds the

organisation. His leadership gained him connections inside and outside the organisation, which empowered him to use other resources, including security agents, to protect himself or his organisation. At the same time, his role as the "creator" of the Zetas as his personal group implied that the group was loyal to him and not necessarily to other members of the group.

After Guillen's extradition, the relation between both groups became complicated until the Zetas emerged as an independent group in the following years. As it is explained in the next section, both groups became enemies and the Zetas began contesting the Gulf cartel for the territorial control of the trafficking routes in Tamaulipas. This situation led to the weakening to the Gulf cartel in contrast to the empowerment of the Zetas as a criminal organisation.

## **Conclusion**

The establishment of the Zetas by Osiel Cardenas did empower the Gulf cartel, giving it a competitive advantage against other cartels. However, the independent consolidation of the Zetas almost meant the end of the Gulf cartel. At this point, the corruption previously established between the Gulf cartel and the government was not that useful against the Zetas' violent offensive. This can be observed as a paradox; the cartel creates a security body to defend itself against the enemies, but at some point, this security body becomes a powerful enemy.

In terms of the evolution of the leadership, the role of Osiel Cardenas Guillen was not contested during his term. This was probably related to his character but also to the existence of the Zetas. His decision of consolidating a security body composed by trained military personnel represented an unforeseen innovation in the criminal world. However, unlike the Sinaloa cartel where the leadership was historically shared between Guzman and Zambada, the monopolistic leadership of Osiel Cardenas meant that after he was gone there was no other person strong enough to keep the factions together.

## **4.6 The Zetas**

### **Origin**

The Zetas were originally created by Osiel Cardenas Guillen. It was supposed to be an armed group in charge of extortion and kidnapping ((SME 6 (*pers.comm.*) 19 January 2018). At the end of the 1990s, Cardenas Guillen started recruiting military personnel from a group of Special Forces of the Mexican Army known as the Aero-mobile Special Forces Group (GAFE) as part of his security detail. According to Langton (2013, loc. 1369) Cardenas approached Lieutenant Arturo Guzman Decena offering him a substantial bribe and asking his help to recruit other 30 members. The group first served as bodyguards and then became the military branch of the Gulf cartel. However, the Zetas as an independent DTO is the result of a process that began in or around 2003 with the arrest of Osiel Cardenas and evolved when he was extradited to the U.S. in 2007.

SME 15, who specialized in the Zetas, explains that after the arrest of Osiel Cardenas:

“the Zetas, that were originally a protection group, began to work parallel to the Gulf cartel, then they didn’t have a relation of cooperation but neither of confrontation. They start working in parallel lines. Osiel is then extradited to the U.S. and that is, I mean the first great hit was of course his [Cardenas] arrest.; the second great hit was the extradition of Osiel Cardenas Guillen, and around 2010, there were frictions. If I remember correctly there was a detention or death of a criminal leader of the Zetas. The Zetas said that the Gulf cartel was who had given up that criminal leader. And then what happened is that the open disputes began. They started disputing [the control over] the territory of Tamaulipas, the territory of Nuevo León, the territory of Veracruz, for example and that is when the great part of the violence started” (SME 15 (*pers.comm.*) 28 September 2018)

Eventually, the loss of Cardenas Guillen’s leadership led to the breakup between the Zetas and the Gulf cartel. Figure 6 explains the situation clearly: Cardenas Guillen was the link between both groups. As founder of the Zetas, the Zetas were loyal to him, but it did not mean that the Zetas as a group were loyal to the cartel.

There is no agreed version on when the separation occurred. SME 15 states that the independence began partly when Guillen was arrested. Authors like Correa Cabrera (2017, p.269) traces the separation of the Zetas to 2009, when the Gulf cartel was supposedly considering an alliance with the Sinaloa Cartel. At that point Heriberto Lazcano called for a massive meeting of Zetas in Matamoros to decide if the group would stay with the Gulf cartel or not. They separated, and the next year and the conflict between both groups began. Another version (Stratford, 2009) is that by 2009 the leader of the Zetas, Heriberto Lazcano, wanted to be the new leader of the Gulf cartel and the leadership of the Gulf cartel’s structure refused. Regardless of when the Zetas became independent, it is clear that in 2010 they were an independent structure of crime, ready to play a role significant role in the illicit scenario in Mexico.

## **Leadership**

The first leader of the Zetas under the command of Osiel Cardenas was Arturo Guzmán Decena until he was shot dead by military personnel in November 2002 (Blancornelas, 2005). The next leader was Rogelio González Pizaña, second in command of Guzmán Decena, who lead the organisation until he was arrested in 2004 (El Siglo de Durango, 2015). The next in the chain of command were Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano and Miguel Angel Treviño (González, D. 2013). Lazcano lead the Zetas while Osiel Cardenas was still leader of the Gulf cartel, and after it became an independent organisation, until he was shot dead in a Navy operation in October 2012 (Secretaría de Marina, 2012).

After Lazcano’s death, Miguel Angel Treviño remained as head of the organisation, sharing the leadership with his brother, Oscar Omar Trevino Morales. However, Miguel Angel was arrested in 2013, leaving the leadership to his brother who was arrested in 2015

(Beittel, 2018, p.18). The Treviño brothers are the last known leaders of the cartel before its fragmentation.

### **Activities**

When the Zetas were part of the Gulf cartel, they acted as the military branch of the cartel, enforcing sentences and collecting debts. As an independent cartel, the Zetas began their independent life not as a traditional DTO like the Gulf or the Sinaloa cartel, but as a criminal organisation. Beittel, (2012, p.17) explains that the Zetas were specialized in other criminal activities “such as fuel theft, extortion, human smuggling and kidnapping” and not necessarily in drug trafficking.

In this regard, SME 15 declared that other DTOs were already doing activities like fuel theft, but the Zetas were the first to achieve a considerable volume. Furthermore, apart from these activities, the Zetas became famous for their counterfeit products. The reason for this profile is related to the activities of the Zetas inside the Gulf cartel. They were more focused towards violence than to drug trafficking. Therefore, when they were independent they lacked the contacts for establishing routes of supply. (SME 15 (*pers.comm.*) 28 September 2018)

However, there is also evidence that the Zetas participated in drug trafficking activities. As stated in the Plea Guilty document signed by Jesus Enrique Rejon Aguilar, a high-ranking member of the Zetas, from 2000 to 2010 the Zetas, in association with the Gulf cartel, trafficked and distributed cocaine and marihuana into the United States (DOJ, 2013b). This previous experience in the matter would have aided the criminal organisation after its independence to have a complex repertoire of illicit activities.

### **Corruption Network**

While this thesis was being written, there was not enough evidence to observe if the Zetas as an independent organisation had a corruptive power similar to the Gulf cartel or the Sinaloa cartel. There is no open source, official information, or other evidence about the links between the Zeta Cartel and the licit world. However, due to the violent profile of the organisation, it is possible that the relation with the licit actors is more an extortion/blackmailing relation than a cooperative partnership.

### **Evolution of the Zetas**

The group gained attention and respect as a criminal organisation thanks to their ways of carrying out violence in Mexico during the end of the 2000s. The violence is relevant because as explained by Correa Cabrera (in Heras, 2018), the Zeta's *modus operandi* in terms of violence changed the illicit scenario in Mexico and in the region. In this regard, SME 15 describes that “In Mexico we had not seen headless or dismembered, or persons that killed with chainsaws; or for example, the Pozoleros [people who killed their victims by boiling them in acid]. We have never seen that of Casino Royal, if I remember correctly in Nuevo Leon, I do not know if you remember when the Zetas set on fire a Casino with people inside, and they burned it. We have never seen the deaths of San Fernando, the clandestine pits. All of that, in a way are innovations in the violence that were brought by the Zetas.” ((*pers.comm.*) 28 September 2018) The Zetas were the first group that created

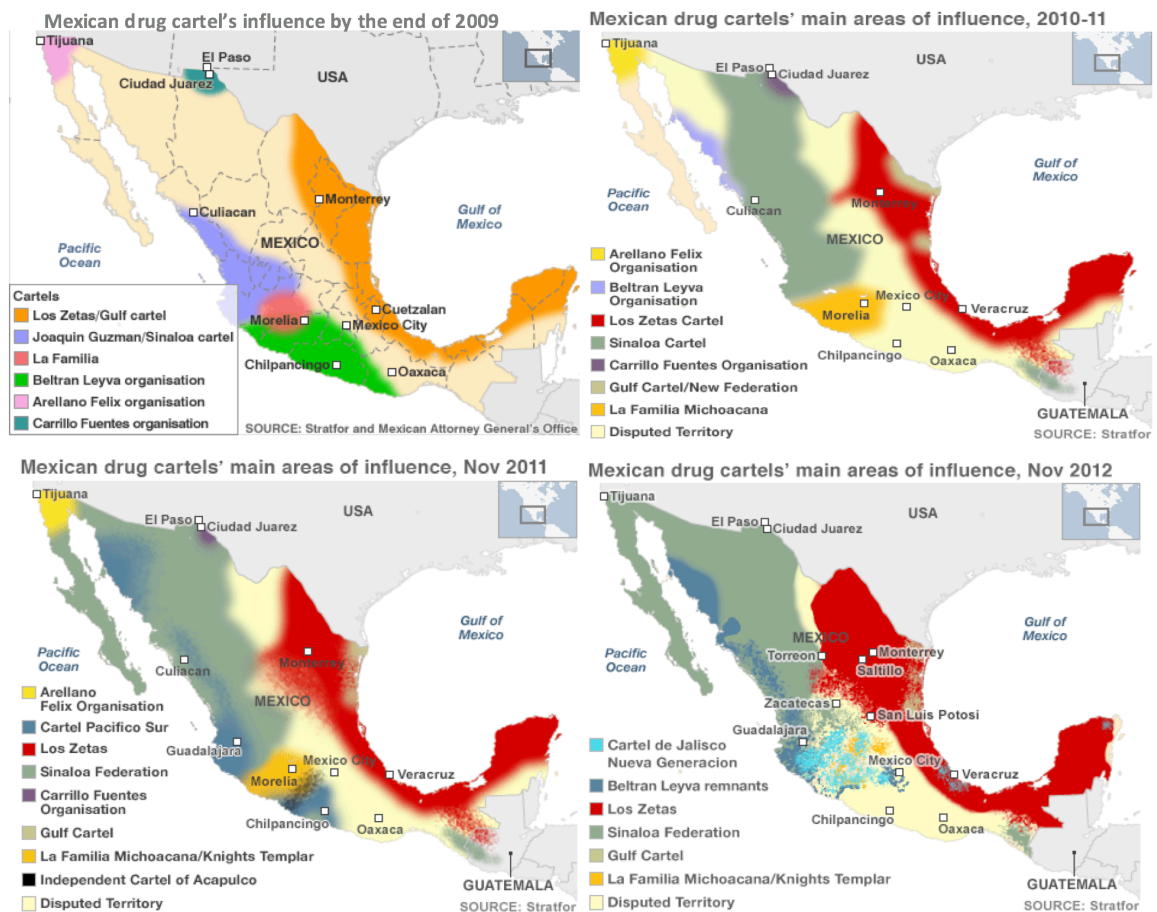
such public demonstrations of violence, and that aided the organisation to be feared by the population.

While they had the partnership with the Gulf cartel, they were actively involved in intimidation practices. As presented in the announcement of Rejon's Plea guilty "The indictment alleges that Rejon Aguilar, his co-defendants and others organised, directed and carried out various acts of violence to retaliate against and to intimidate anyone who interfered with, or who were perceived to potentially interfere with, the cocaine and marijuana trafficking activities of the Company" (DOJ, 2013b, para.6) This means that during the 2000s, the Zetas gained experience on creating fear and that impacted the evolution of the organisation once it left the Gulf cartel.

After its separation, the Zetas engaged in a ruthless fight for the control of these territories. The evolution in terms of territorial control can be observed in Figure 7. The Zetas empowerment over the Gulf cartel was relatively easy due to their knowledge of the organisation and their military background. It can be assumed that their tactical and strategic knowledge was an advantage to fight the Gulf's enemies during the 2000s, and to fight and decimate the Gulf cartel after their separation. This explains why the Zetas were able to take over the territory of the Gulf cartel in a very short period of time.

The evolution and growth of the Zetas is also related to its use of violence. Unlike the other cartels, the Zetas did not attempt to earn social support within their territories. They "used intimidation as a strategy to maintain control of territory, making use of social media and public displays of bodies and body parts to send messages to frighten Mexican security forces, the local citizenry, and rival organisations." (Beittel, 2018, p.19) An example of this can be observed in the testimonies given during the trial of one of the Plaza bosses, Marciano Millan Vasquez. As stated in the sentence Millan was "sicario (or assassin), drug trafficker and weapons distributor until 2013 when he took over control of the Piedras Negras "Plaza" (or drug trafficking corridor) for the Los Zetas led by Miguel Trevino Morales (aka "Z-40") and his brother, Oscar Omar Trevino Morales (aka "Z-42")" (DOJ-Western District of Texas, 2017, para.4). He participated in mass murders and torture activities carried out by the group once the organisation was already independent.

Figure 7 Cartel territorial influence in Mexican territory between 2009 and 2012.



Source: Integrated by the author from images retrieved from the BBC 2009 and 2012, and Islas 2013.

The group began grand scale drug trafficking activities, taking advantage of local drug traffickers. As describes by the DOJ-Western District of Texas:

“Its members purchase bulk quantities of narcotics and sell them abroad as well as to other non-Los Zetas drug traffickers operating in Mexico. In addition to those considered actual members of the Los Zetas, any large-scale narcotics trafficker operating in a region controlled by the Los Zetas must support and associate with the Los Zetas or risk execution. The Los Zetas not only supplies the drugs (marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, etc.) to the traffickers, they charge the traffickers a fee (called the “quota”) for the privilege of operating in Los Zetas territory. That fee includes cash payments as well as firearms and other munitions (ammunition, magazines, etc.).” (Western District of Texas, 2017, para 12)

With this system, the Zetas were both, traffickers and administrators of independent small trafficking groups in the area. This was an advantage because it allowed the Zetas to take benefit from the local criminal networks without necessarily investing resources inside it. The relation described is more like a business supplier, which requires less control from the Zetas, but does not necessarily diminishes the proceedings of crime and their criminal power.



Although the Zetas, as a structure, became strong and feared in the criminal world as well as in the society, there is a special consideration about the rapid changes in the illicit world. SME 15 analyses how despite the Zetas were a powerful criminal organisation in 2011, the organisation weakened at an unpredicted pace; after 2011 there were three unforeseen events that destabilised the Zetas. “The first one was the capture of the key leaders of the organisation; the second one was that there were internal fractures; and the third one was that other DTOs started fighting the Zetas, such as Sinaloa, and also, afterwards the cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación, and of course the Gulf cartel after the breakup” (*pers.comm.*) 28 September 2018).

SME 15 adds that “Yes, there was a part from the Mexican state [referring to governmental strategies], that I think was good, but also there were internal and external processes that led to the weakening of the cartel. One of the components, for example, at the end of the administration [Peña Nieto administration] that the National Commissioner Renato Sales and the Secretary of Government had somehow referred to as a success, is that from the 122 priority targets, that were basically the most important criminal leaders... if I remember correctly, between 110 or 112 were captured.”

Adding to this information, the press release of the sentence of Juan Francisco Treviño (nephew of the Treviño brothers), gives new information to what happened to the Zetas. As stated in the document published by the U.S. DOJ, the “trial testimony [presented during Juan Francisco’s trial] revealed that after his uncles’ arrests, Los Zetas splintered into two groups and Kiko Trevino took over leadership of one of those two groups, the Cartel Del Noreste (CDN). In this role, he controlled all the drug and firearm trafficking, enforcement, and money laundering operations of CDN. Trevino continued in this leadership role until his arrest in 2016.” (DOJ-Western District of Texas, 2018, para.4)

The fracture of the Zetas, along with Juan Francisco’s later arrest and trial demonstrates that crime does not end when the leaders of the organisation are captured. Furthermore, the end or fracture of the organisation does not mean the end of the criminal activities. The Zetas fractured after 2015, but this did not prevent that the two factions that emerged from continuing the illicit activities. What is more, it did not prevent the new factions from being led by people related to the leadership of the Zetas.

## **Conclusion**

The emergence of the Zetas was fast and feared. Over a period of 10 years the Zetas went from being private bodyguards of a drug lord and a paramilitary branch of the Gulf cartel, to be one of the most feared and powerful cartels. And then, they fractured in several pieces that diminished the relevance of the organisation in less than 4 years. At this point, it can be observed that the path dependency of the evolution of the Zetas was related to initial decisions taken during its creation. The fact that it was created from the special forces of the army gave the group an specific profile characterised by its military know how, discipline and hierarchy. Furthermore, the origins of the Zetas were linked to Osiel Cardenas Guillen, this explains the breakup with the Gulf Cartel after Osiel’s extradition. In this regard, the following empowerment of the Zetas against the Gulf cartel was also linked to

the military capacities that the group had built during the time they served Osiel Cardenas Guillen.

In addition, the new profile of the Zetas in terms of violence changed the structure of the criminal dynamic. When other cartels observed that the Gulf had a professional paramilitary branch, the other criminal structures began replicating the Gulf-Zetas model. As more cartels created professional security bodies, the violence spiked and inter-cartel conflicts became a war. At this point, the creation of the Zetas impacted the decisions of the other criminal organizations to develop special forces that could defend the organizations from the Zetas.

The conclusion that can be observed from the Zetas' development is related to the innovations they brought. On the one hand, innovation in violence represented a competitive advantage against the other criminal organisations in Mexico, which provoked a change for adaptation in those other groups. On the second hand, the grand number of activities was an innovation for other DTOs who started adding other criminal activities to their repertoire. This in turn, complicated the criminal scenario in Mexico because it meant a bigger network of illicit activities and contacts which is more difficult to dismantle.

#### **4.7 Applying the multiple triangulation approach and assembling the puzzle**

From the evolution and characteristic of each cartel, I identified different events and characteristics that can be analysed through multiple triangulation and visualised using the puzzle approach to understand the behaviour of the cartels. This behaviour can be differentiated in two ways: the first one is the intra cartel level, meaning the dynamics inside the organisation. The second is the inter-cartel level, that refers to the dynamics between different cartels (Islas, 2019b). Furthermore, the developments inside one level have the capacity of affecting the happenings of the other.

The first variable or piece of the puzzle within the inter-cartel dynamics refers to the heritage of each organisation and the sequence of events that shaped it. For the Sinaloa cartel, the history shared with the other organisations that emerged from the Guadalajara at the end of the 1980s shaped the cartel's behaviour during the 1990s. The enmities built between the factions of the Guadalajara cartel were inherited once all the groups were independent organisations. This is best observed through the offensive of the Sinaloa Cartel against the Tijuana Cartel. Inter-cartel conflicts shaped the interaction of both cartels, being led by localized practices of violence. Hence, the development of the organisations during the 1990s was dependant on the origins of each cartel. In other words, the attacks and conflicts between the different factions of the Guadalajara cartel as well as the territorial decisions that were taken when the Guadalajara organization separated, created a path dependency for the evolution the Sinaloa cartel.

Another example where we can apply path dependency can be observed in the Zetas. The original decision for its creation was to provide security to Gulf cartel's drug lord Osiel Cardenas Guillen. The group grew inside the Gulf cartel as its military branch in charge of the security strategies and operations of the cartel. However, their original closeness to

Cardenas Guillen lead them to seek independence once he was extradited. The activities of the group after it became completely independent, was focused to fight and diminish the power of the Gulf cartel. What is more, the knowledge that the Zetas had acquired with the Gulf cartel was a key element for their tactics and success in this inter-cartel conflict.

The second variable is the arrest of the leaders of the organisations. The arrests are critical junctures because such events have the power to affect the intra-cartel and inter-cartel stability. The loss of leadership creates a power vacuum inside the organisation; unless this is filled with a strong leader able to keep all the factions together, the factions start fighting each other for the leadership, creating struggle at the inside of the organisation. The best examples of this internal conflicts are observed in the Gulf cartel after the loss of Osiel Cardenas, and in the Zetas after the loss of the Treviño brothers. Both organisations fractured after the loss of the leader.

As for the inter-cartel conflicts, there is a sequence of events that can be observed where the loss of leadership is perceived by other DTOs as a moment in which the organisation is weak. The cartels that perceive this weakness in its opponents move against them for the control of territories, and this leads to an escalation of violence between the cartels. In this sequence, the loss of leadership leads an offensive by rival cartels, which leads to a war between the cartels, which leads to the creation of alliances between the organizations and so on. The Sinaloa cartel represents a good example of how a cartel aims to take advantage of a rival's weakness. When the leader of the Gulf cartel was arrested, the Sinaloa cartel attempted to take over the control of the border crossings in Tamaulipas. This created an inter-cartel conflict because the Gulf cartel responded by sending the Zetas to defend the contested territory, and by cresting an alliance with the Tijuana cartel against the Sinaloa cartel.

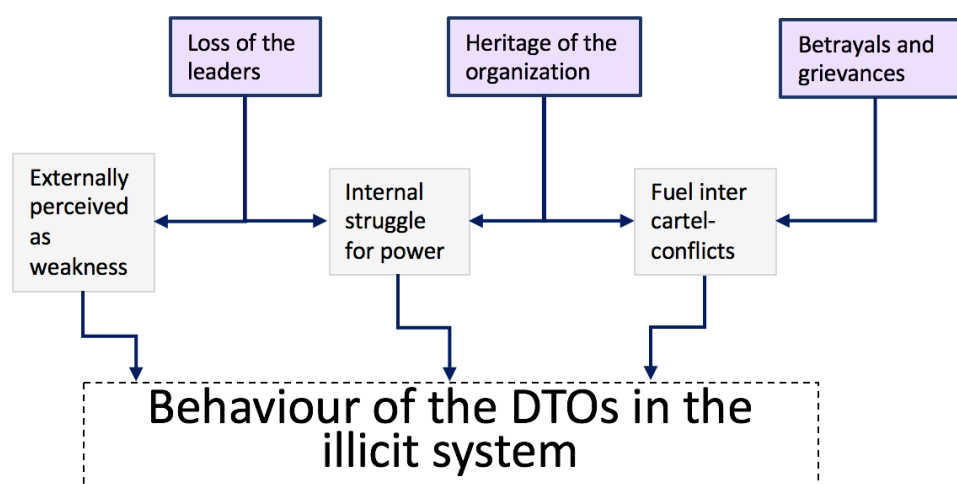
The third variable refers to betrayal and family grievances. For example, the attacks to family members or assassination of a brother of the leadership causes inter-cartel conflicts. This was observed specifically through the assassination of Guzman's brother and the retribution that follows. At this point the outbreaks of the inter-cartel violence can be also traced to specific events such as the assassination of family members of the cartels' leadership. In this case, the assassination caused by rival cartels creates deep grievances that are answered with further attacks, leading to a sequence of hostile actions between the organizations. In the end, this can be identified as path dependency because original decisions of cartel A to take actions against cartel B, lead cartel B to actions of retaliation and vengeance. This situation pushes cartel A to escalate violence, which will be later answered with further hostile actions by cartel B, beginning a cycle of retaliation.

At this point, the information gathered from the witnesses of Mr Guzman Loera's trial in 2019 was particularly relevant to identify critical junctures and understand path dependency in the evolution of the Sinaloa and the Gulf cartel in Mexico. The decisions taken by Guzman Loera, to kill leaders of other organizations and start an offensive against other DTOs like the Tijuana and the Gulf cartels shape the Sinaloa's cartel empowerment in Mexico. The Sinaloa cartel took advantage of other cartel's weaknesses to expand its operations in Mexico. At the same time, in the case of the Gulf cartel, the war against the

Sinaloa cartel had the effect of empowering its Zetas paramilitary branch. This situation would backfire on the cartel once the Zetas decided to become an independent organization.

These observations permit a better understanding of the DTO violence. Islas (2019b) notices that there are two types of violence related to the internal dynamics of the illicit world. On the one hand, the violence generated inside one organisation where factions of the same group are attacking each other. On the other hand, there is the inter-cartel conflicts in which the different organisations battle one another. This violence is caused by the three main variables explained earlier, which are graphically represented in Figure 8. These observations can be used to explain the behaviour of the cartels inside the illicit system and their use of violence. The power vacuums in the criminal system and within different organisations are observed by other cartels as an opportunity. Therefore, power vacuums shape to some extent the DTO activities of expansion and violence within the illicit system.

Figure 8 Behaviour of the DTOs in the illicit system



Source: Created by the Author

Another important consideration is the interaction of the licit groups with illicit actors. The corruption between the authorities and the DTOs during the 1980s and 1990s allowed the Guadalajara cartel, the Sinaloa cartel and the Gulf cartel, to establish large illicit networks for drug trafficking to the U.S. Therefore, bribing and having the protection of a Governor or General, implied that the cartel was relatively safe from governmental prosecution. The peaceful relations between the authorities and the DTOs during these decades were sometimes altered through episodes of violence, such as the assassination of Camarena or of Cardinal Posadas Ocampo. Even when these two events represent breakup points in the relation between the licit and illicit actors, they also show the reluctance of the government to completely take down the organisations.

On its own, the licit system in Mexico did not show a disposition to solve the drug trafficking problem. It was not until big events happened that the authorities arrested some of the relevant drug lords. I argue that this is a vital point because it allowed the establishment of a culture of impunity and corruption in which the cartels had it easy to

bribe members of the police and the army in exchange for protection. The Sinaloa cartel is the best example of this network. The evolution of its corruption network reached members of the executive branch and federal justice institutions as it was recently confirmed through the witnesses at Guzman's trial.

The situation is highly relevant because corruption is related to impunity and these two factors can diminish a country's capacity to combat crime. Furthermore, the larger the corruption network of the cartels, the more difficult it was to contain their outbreaks of violence when they happened. For example, Osiel Cardenas had bribed the police in some parts of Tamaulipas during the 2000s. This meant that the police were paid to allow the actions of the Zetas as the violent branch of the Gulf cartel. The same example can be observed with the Sinaloa cartel and the bribes to the local authorities in its strongholds.

This prevalence of local impunity and corruption grew to the point that as the cartels expanded their influence on other states, the cartels stop having a "low profile". At this point, the sequence of critical junctures in the DTO history marked their expansion patterns of the cartels. First, the unequal division of the Guadalajara cartel along with the enmities between the Sinaloa and the Tijuana cartel lead the Sinaloa DTO to establish a long-lasting fight to achieve control of the Tijuana territory. This conflict escalated to provoke the assassination of Archbishop Posadas Ocampo. This led to further inter-cartel violence, and to a crackdown from the federal government against the Tijuana cartel since the 1990s, which in turn benefited the Sinaloa cartel.

During the 2000s, the Sinaloa cartel moved against the Gulf cartel, which generated further conflict and instability in the illicit world. The violence grew out of control, jeopardizing public security on the one hand, and the efficiency and legality of the local governmental institutions on the other. The deep corruption and the loss of local governability was what prompted new counter-narcotic policies that eventually lead to the "war on drugs" that began in 2006. The next section explores the role that the changes in legal institutions and the counter narcotic policies had in the empowerment of the Mexican DTOs.

#### **4.8 Mexican security institutions and counter narcotic policies**

The objective of the present part is to explain how the governmental institutions, particularly the security LEAs carried out actions and implemented policies that altered the evolution of the DTOs. The first thing that needs to be acknowledge was that corruption between governmental authorities and drug traffickers was a critical enabler for the enlargement of DTOs. This corruption structure grew parallel to the political developments in Mexico. In past publications, some authors (Valdez Castellanos, 2013, loc.2192; Watt, and Zepeda, 2012, p. 67) had argued that it was improbable that the different high-level officials and politicians did not know about the relations between the licit and the illicit actors. Valdez Castellanos (loc. 2149) went as far as stating that during the 1990s there were tacit agreements between the drug trafficking organisations and some governmental officials at different levels of government.

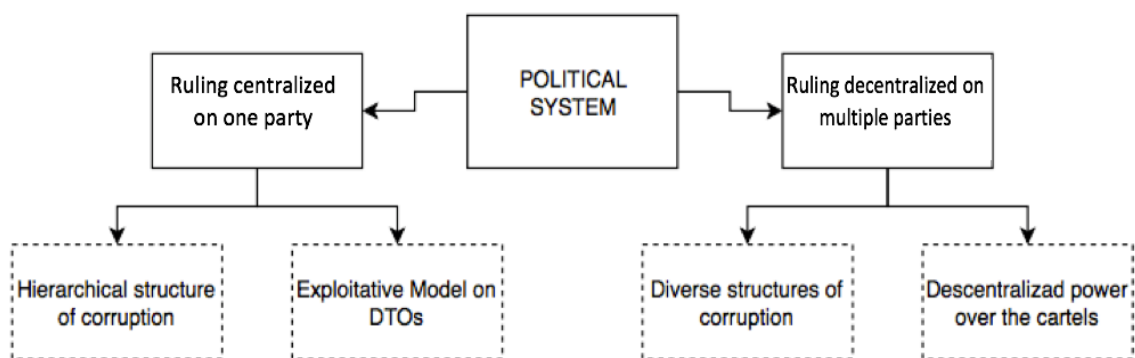
This information has been corroborated through the different investigations and trials carried out by the U.S. DOJ, such as the example of Guzman Loera in 2019 (DOJ, 2019a, para.8). The evidence of these interactions was presented earlier in this chapter, proving that the Sinaloa and Gulf cartels had contacted and bribed local and federal authorities, including high level governmental personnel. The construction of this network can be explained through the links to the political developments in Mexico. The country was characterised by a government centralised on the executive power in which the Party of the Institutional Revolution (PRI for its name in Spanish) that controlled almost all the democratic-elected positions (CIA, 1980; Cordova; 2003). This meant a direct implementation of the federal policies at all levels of government.

The centralization of power in the PRI would have given the LAEs the power to extort the criminal organisations. Pimentel (2000, p.40) mentions that in Mexico "organised crime becomes a source of funding and illicit enrichment for the political elite and their social control agents. Drug traffickers in these settings, after achieving some entrepreneurial successes, are taught out by the system and taxed and disciplined into their role within the system." (Pimentel, 2000, p.40). This situation was accurate while the government was centralised, but it was altered partly by the fracture of the Guadalajara cartel and partly by the democratic evolution of Mexico.

The democratic reforms in Mexico allowed an increase in the number of political parties and in the political representation in the congress (DOF, 1977, 1986, 1990, 1993 and 1996). One can say that the aftermath of the democratization reforms in Mexico caused a change in the relation between the governmental institutions and the and the licit actors in Mexico. The increase in democratic plurality is related to the decrease of the federal government's control on DTOs; whilst the President belonged to the PRI, many of the Governors and Mayors elected were members of a variety of different parties. In other words, as explained by Bensusán and Middlebrow (2013, p.41) the federal electoral reforms and the social pressure lived between the 1980s and the 1990s lead to a reduction of the restrictive centralised control.

The reduction of the centralised power impacted the relation between the DTOs and the Mexican government and its security institutions. This idea is presented in Figure 9. The decentralization of political power led to an alteration of the political structure which affected the corruption structures –usually controlled by the centralized government– and thus it affected the relationship that the politicians had with the criminal world. The development of the democratic transition and its effects on crime is a phenomenon that needs further study; however, it can be said that there is a close relation between the heritage of the authoritarian system, the evolution of democracy in Mexico and the multiplication and empowerment of the drug cartels and criminal organisations.

Figure 9 Political systems in Mexico and the difference on criminal control



Source: Created by the author

### Involvement of the military

In Mexico, during the second half of the 20th century, the military's principal focus was on destroying illicit drug crops. At the same time, military personnel received "gifts" from the DTOs as payment for protection or immunity (Pimentel, 2000, p.43). The power of the army was enough to keep the traffickers in order; punishments were carried out through arrests or through seizures and destructions of drugs. It was a calculated equation, to destroy enough drugs to keep appearances, but not enough to stop the business from growing.

The involvement of General Gutierrez Rebollo is the best example of the relation between the DTOs and the Mexican military. The Mexican Secretary of National Defense (SEDENA) divides the national territory into military zones observed in Figure 10. During his years of service, General Gutierrez was commander of three different military zones: the XII, the V and the IV (Redaccion AN, 2013). In 1996, he was commissioned to lead the National Institute for the Combat of Drugs (PROCESO, 1996, Online). He was respected for arresting several high-profile drug traffickers including "El Guero" Palma. However, as reported by Fazio (1998, p.77), all the groups affected by his law enforcement activities were enemies of the Carrillo Fuentes Organisation. And that is why many considered him as an example of the corruption observed in the ranks of the Mexican Military. On February 6th, 1997, Gen. Rebollo was arrested under charges of protecting the Carrillo Fuentes Organisation, (Preston, 1997, Online). The case has never been proven or disproven. Regardless of the veracity of the charges, this case is important because it shows the power that the cartels had in Mexico even before the 2000s.

Figure 10 Military Zones in Mexico (RM for the name in Spanish)



Source: Retrieved from Gandaria, M. 2017.

However, Arvide's (2013) sustains that Gutierrez Rebollo was innocent. Arvide argues that the General was an enemy of the Carrillo Fuentes, and he was digging too deep against the cartel. This would have included other networks of corruption, which was the reason he was charged and judged. If the allegations of Rebollo's innocence are true, this implies that there was a setup against him. The relevant question is who would have the power to set up a member of the military elite in Mexico? Arguing for his innocence would mean he was, in fact, fighting the Arellano Felix cartel, which would mean that somewhere in the criminal structure of the Arellano Felix cartel had a link with the federal government that was powerful enough to jail a General. The implications of this would be an example of the vast structure of corruption within the upper echelons of the federal authorities, which framed an elite member of the Mexican Army.

In May 2013, the family of General Gutierrez revealed that his arrest was a punishment for an investigation that linked the family of President Zedillo Ponce de León (1994-2000) to the group lead by the Amado Carrillo and Amezcua Brothers, who were producing methamphetamines (Redacción AN, 2013). These allegations imply collusion between the executive branch and drug trafficking organisations. If this is the case, it demonstrates that the relationship between legal government and illicit actors Mexico was at this time reaching levels 3 and 4, in which high level members of the federal government were involved. However, the level of violence and DTO power was still under the exploitative model, where the legal power elite had the last word.

Considering the second option, that General Gutierrez Rebollo was indeed guilty, my observations are that the episode would exemplify the relationship of high-rank members of the military with drug trafficking groups. As leader of the Military Region, Mr Gutierrez Rebollo should have, apart from all the people he was commanding, a chauffeur and personal assistants that could have probably noticed or suspected his relationship with the DTOs. No one with such a high rank in the military can establish a relationship with the drug cartels during seven years without someone else noticing. This could mean 1) the



people around him suspected or knew he was corrupted but decided (out of fear or obedience) to do nothing or 2) the people around Gutierrez Rebollo was also benefiting from the relation with the Carrillo Fuentes Organisation.

The analysis of this case also raises the question about the legality of his actions while he was commander of the three military zones. At the same time, it brings attention to question which other commanders of other Military Regions were exploiting, collaborating or protecting other DTOs. The main reason to consider the involvement of other Military zone commanders is that the V Military zone does not include the border states with the United States, and the main activity of the Carrillo Fuentes organisation, just as the Guadalajara Cartel, was trafficking drugs to the U.S.

Another thought to consider is related to the timing in which General Gutierrez Rebollo began his alleged relationship with the DTO. If it was when he got his position in the V Military Zone, it could imply that there was already a system of protection taking place with the former commander, in which case the previous leaders of the Military Zone should have been investigated. If it were because he had a personal link with the group, that would imply that before arriving at his post he was already helping the Carrillo Fuentes.

Since the Carrillo Fuentes group was part of the Guadalajara cartel before 1989, it would mean that before that year, this General had colluded with members of the Guadalajara Cartel or at least knew some of them. In a different line of analysis, the fact that he decided to favour one fraction of the Guadalajara cartel after it separated would imply that the development of the multi-cartel system, as well as the individual empowerment or disappearance of the individual groups, has also been linked in a major or minor way to the degree of support of authorities.

Due to the aforementioned, we can consider three facts: he was the leader of the V Zone for seven years until 1996; he was named Director of the INCD in 1996 (PROCESO, 1996, Online); and he was arrested two months later in February 1997. Regardless of the innocence or guilt of the General, this is an example of the collusion of some of the federal authorities with the DTOs, as well as the degree of corruption between the elite members of the federal government in Mexico and the illicit world.

If he was innocent, his fall implied the collusion of other high-level government officials and politicians who framed him to appear guilty. However, considering if he was guilty, his long-stay in power could also be an example of the corruption in the higher structures of the Military, or a big failure in the Military counter-intelligence body to discover that such a General was being corrupted. Either way, before the 2000s, the illicit actors in Mexico already had strong links with members of the military elite.

### **Involvement of the Federal Direction of Security and the Justice System**

While the Military oversaw counter-narcotic operations and the destruction of drug crops, the Federal Direction of Security was a centralised governmental agency that was in charge of countering guerrillas during the 60s and the 70s. However, while executing its mandate, DFS personnel started to get involved with DTOs, (Valdes Castellanos, 2013) developing a symbiotic relationship with the illicit actors. As Explained by Pimentel (2000,

p.45), while fighting the guerrillas, the DFS personnel got involved in drug trafficking activities mainly near the Guadalajara region. However, as guerrilla movements decreased during the 1970s and 1980s, the DFS was left with a counter-guerrilla capacity that surpassed the actual problems in the country.

The DFS had a main role in the relationship between the licit and the illicit actors. Serrano (2007, p. 264) states that the DFS was the “first chain link” in the institutional relation used by the government to control the DTOs. This link is observable through two main events that took place in the 1980s:

1) The case of Rafael Caro Quintero’s protection and identification cards from the Directorate of Federal Security (DFS). Rafael was part of the leadership of the Guadalajara Cartel and escaped Mexico because of his involvement in the case of Agent Camarena. As stated in Valdes Castellanos (2013, loc.2342), on February 9th, 1985, Caro Quintero, flew from Mexico on his private jet using his DFS credentials to go through airport security without being identified or arrested by the Mexican authorities or by the DEA agents that were present. This was the same day that DEA Special Agent Enrique Camarena was killed at the Caro Quintero ranch in Mexico (CNN Mexico, 2013).

Furthermore, at the moment of his arrest, Caro Quintero was carrying DFS original identifications, signed by the director of the DFS, José Antonio Zorrilla (Lupsha, 1991, p.45). This discovery proved proof of the persistent corruption inside the DFS. If the Director signed the identification cards willingly, it shows the relation of a high member of the security community with the DTOs. If he did it unknowingly, it can be assumed that someone inside the DFS was corrupted and was helping the Guadalajara cartel. Either way, corruption persists in a structure in which high-level personnel in the Government were collaborating with members of the Guadalajara cartel.

2) The case of Sergio Espino Verdin, a Commander of the DFS in Mexico. As stated in the indictment of the DEA for the Enrique Camarena Case, Espino was also involved with the Guadalajara cartel (DOJ-Central District of California, 1991, p.4). Along with the actions of DFS director Jose Antonio Zorrilla, the involvement of Espino Verdin brings light to the network of corruption that the DFS had specifically with the Guadalajara cartel. Apart from the cartel’s business, the collaboration of the DFS can be considered as another relevant factor for the great strength that the cartel achieved by the mid 1980s.

If the commanders were involved in illicit activities, it is very likely that some of the personnel under their command would have been involved in the network of corruption and impunity between the Guadalajara cartel and the authorities. The existence of this grey network, along with the abuse of power by the DFS, was part of the reason why it was dissolved in 1985 after Camarena’s assassination (Morales, 2011, pp. 8-9). The end of the DFS eventually was another factor that altered the structure of the relation between the cartels and the law enforcement agencies.

Even when these episodes could be considered outdated for the situation existing in Mexico today, I consider them vital to understanding why the cartels achieved their current organisational complexity. First of all, the corruption embedded between the DTOs and the

authorities was not something that occurred spontaneously during the 2000s. It was something that had been growing since before the 1980s. Moreover, the relevance of pointing out the existence of the corruption network between the Guadalajara cartel and the authorities relates to the legacy of the Guadalajara cartel.

Although the cartel was divided, the drug flow never stopped. The new drug lords were either related or had worked closely and were mentored by Felix Gallardo or the Guadalajara cartel's leadership. This also meant that the network of corruption that existed with Felix Gallardo adapted to the new multi-cartel system. An example of this adaptation could be considered the case of Gen. Gutierrez Rebollo, that regardless of his guilt or innocence, gives light to the levels of corruption and impunity that existed during the 1990s.

Furthermore, these conditions of corruption and impunity influenced the decentralisation of power over DTOs that has already been altered by democratization. This process empowered the cartels at the national level. However, the cartels' strength is also related to international conditions that were taking place at the same time. For this reason, the next section adds a new piece to the puzzle in explaining how international circumstances had a direct or indirect impact on the development of the Mexican DTOs.

## **Mexican counter narcotic policies strategies 2000-2018**

### **Security Strategies during President's Fox administration 2000-2006**

The administration of President Fox represented an advancement concerning security structures. In 2000, on the last day of his administration, President Zedillo (1994-2000) published a mandate for the basis of the Coordination System of Public Security (Poder Ejecutivo, 2000, p.1). In the same year, the federal government created the Secretary of Public Security and set the basis for better public security coordination (CESOP, 2006, López & Fonseca, 2013, p. 69). The relevance of this SSP was that it separated the public security affairs from the SEGOB. The idea was to create an organ that consolidated and coordinated a national strategy against crime and other issues related to public security.

The Legislation of the Federal Public Administration was modified to include the creation of the SSP and establish its responsibilities and powers, Teutli (2014) presents a list of the primary responsibilities of the SSP, those of particular importance being:

- Develop the policies of public security and propose the criminal policy to help in the prevention of crime.
- Be the head of the Council of National Public Security
- Increase the public participation in the creation of related plans and strategies
- Organise, administrate, direct and supervise the Federal Preventive Police
- Establish a system for obtaining, analysing, and processing information for the prevention of crime

- Work together with federal, local and municipal authorities, when the institutions request it.
- Administrate the penal system and be responsible for the inmates (Teutli, 2014, pp. 69-70)

It can be argued that the creation of the Secretary of Public Security was part of the decentralization of the government observed during the PRI times. The relevance of this process is that, as explained earlier (see Chapter 4) during the second half of the 20th century, the SEGOB used its power over the public security to control social unrest. Additionally, the Directorate of Federal Security from the SEGOB was also a relevant tool for the relationship between the Guadalajara cartel and the Federal Government. For that reason, the new SSP was a step forward, away from the centralization of power and the exploitative model. At the same time, it allowed for further specialisation, and for better coordination of all the security apparatus and a better creation and implementation of federal security strategies.

To ensure this independence, the Secretary of Public Security was given additional powers. The modifications of the Law of Federal Public Administration established that the head of the SSP was also the head of the National Council of Public Security (Poder Ejecutivo, 2000, pp.4-5). Additional reforms to the Law of Federal Preventive Police transferred the executive power of the federal police to the head of the SSP (Teutli; 2014, pp. 69-70). Furthermore, in 2005, the Congress approved the Law of National security with included regulations of the Center of Information and National Security (Islas, 2013, p. 31). These modifications ensured the legal capacities of the Secretary of Public Security and decentralized the control of the security strategies to specialized agencies.

These legal changes modified the institutional structure and the capacities of the security agencies in Mexico. They set the framework that the next administration would use to fight criminal organisations in the following years. The professionalization of the federal policemen became a goal and part of the security strategy. However, these changes did not affect the cartels right away. While the Mexican government was “re-organising” the security communities for the better, the strategy against DTOs was limited.

The government targeted the heads of the drug cartels. The most important critical junctures in terms of the units of analysis of this research were the arrest of the leader of the Gulf Cartel, Osiel Cardenas Guillen in 2003, and of Miguel Guzmán Loera, brother of the leader of the Sinaloa Cartel in 2005. As detailed in Chapter 5, the arrest of Cárdenas allowed the Sinaloa cartel to attack the Gulf cartel for the control of border crossings in Tamaulipas, which resulted in a war between both groups. The second arrest became part of a wave of revenges that generated violent conflicts between the Sinaloa cartel and other groups, including former allies.

The fact of these dynamics is that while the cartels were fighting each other, they need firepower. At this point, geography and arms policies played a vital role. On the one hand, the Mexican Law of Firearms and Explosives (DOF, 2015) forbids private citizens to buy and carry weapons of small calibre without federal permission from the Secretary of Defence; and it forbids the public commercialization and ownership and of high calibre

weapons, leaving their use exclusively for the security forces. On the other hand, the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution gives the right to keep and bear firearms (National Archives, 2018) which allows a large market for firearms in the US. This legal difference in both countries, the prohibition in Mexico and the availability in the U.S., allowed for the establishment of a constant demand of firearms and weapons from the Mexican DTOs to the U.S. weapon dealers.

The targeting of leaders altered the DTO dynamics. However, the government did not target the operational and financial structure of the organisations (Islas; 2013, p.32). The loss of leadership led to an increase in violence between the cartels as it was described in Chapter 5. The Sinaloa Cartel and the Gulf Cartel (still with the Zetas under its control) were fighting each other, creating a war with allies in different parts of the Mexican territory.

As a response to the evolution and behaviour of the illicit actors, in June of 2005, the government initiated an operation called “Mexico Seguro” in several states of the republic (Los Pinos, 2005; Astorga, 2015, pp. 222-224). This operation was a national scale effort, and it was a prelude to the War on Drugs. It included the participation of the SEGOB, SSP, SEDENA, SEMAR, and the Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit, as well as the local authorities (EFE, 2005). This operation started in Tamaulipas, Sinaloa and Baja California to recover the governance and stability of the states.

In the days following the announcement of the operation, the government stated that part of the success of its implementation was the decrease of crime rates in the municipalities where the operation was taking place. This was considered an innovative program to tackle organised crime (CESOP, 2005, pp.23). The activities of the authorities included seizures of drug shipments, as well as the arrests of those involved in drug trafficking activities which was documented quantitatively. On this respect, Montero (2012) argued that apart from those activities the government did not measure if the strategy was helping the recovery of public spaces.

However, for the units of analysis, it can be argued that this strategy represented additional pressure. My argument is that the loss of shipments and people meant the disruption in the drug flow and the loss of resources in a time when the DTOs were fighting inter-DTO wars. This strategy led to the escalation of violence from the DTOs to the security forces. By the end of 2005, the DTOs were fighting two fronts; one against each other and one against the government.

### **Security Strategies during President’s Calderón administration 2006-2012**

The beginning of President Calderón’s administration was marked by his decision to deploy the army to the state of Michoacán under “Operation Michoacán” (SME 25 (*pers.comm.*) 21 May 2019). This had the intention of fighting criminal organisations while depurating and strengthening the Federal Police (SME 28 (*pers.comm.*) 19 September 2019). This was the beginning of the war against organised crime. The main idea was to present a united fight against the illicit actors in Mexico (Presidencia de la República, 2007, p. 77). And it was characterized by the involvement and coordination of all the security apparatus to fight DTOs, by disrupting their illicit resources and taking down the leadership of the different groups.

The former Secretary of Public Security of Mexico, Alejandro Poiré (SME 7), explained that the Strategy originated from the “the notion that there had been a significant growth in the magnitude and capacities of criminal organisations in Mexico; in their aggressiveness towards the institutions, in their ability to cooptate particular local level law enforcement institutions” (SME 7 (*pers.comm.*) 26 January 2017). This statement is similar to that given by SME 24, as stated in whom “the strategy was the response for public security challenges as: extended presence of organised crime in different parts of the territory; well-structured criminal groups with great corruption and violence capabilities; weak law-enforcement institutions, particularly at state and local level; increasing drug consumption and weakened social capital in certain areas” (SME 24 (*pers.comm.*) 21 May 2019).

In other words, the President did not have another choice but to begin a frontal assault against organised crime. As narrated in Chapter 5, the criminal organisations were battling each other for the control of diverse territories and seeking vengeance for personal grievances. As mentioned by SME 25, the strategy was based on a straightforward combat against criminal organisations by using the Armed Forces ((*pers.comm.*) 21 May 2019).

SME 7 divides Calderón’s security strategy into three parts: 1) “to counter and limit and bring to justice, the main and most dangerous criminal organisations in Mexico, and to dismantle their capacities in a large number of settings, both operational, logistics, financial and human capital wise.” 2) “a thorough re-branding, modernization and re-investment in the whole human rights and law enforcement institutions setup of Mexico, both at the federal and at the local and municipal level”; and 3) “to re-construct the social fabric” that was severely damaged by criminal organisations. (SME 7 (*pers.comm.*), 26 January 2017). Furthermore, he comments that the efficiency of the governmental strategy in reducing violence in places like Tamaulipas and Baja California. This information is accurate in terms of homicide rates; as observed in Appendix 3, after the military deployment of 2006 and 2007 the violence decreased during the first months of 2007.

The observation of this “success” explains the continuation of the security strategies in the next years of the administration. The figures in Appendix 3 shows a unified decrease of the homicides rates after the beginning of the military deployments in 2006 and 2007. At the beginning of 2007, when the new administration was planning the security strategies, the registry of this sharp decrease would have been the reason for further military action. By comprehending this precise moment and the decrease of the homicide reports, it can be understood that the option of deploying further military and navy personnel was observed as a possible way to end the violence.

Additionally, the federal strategy had the objective of increasing the capacities of the security forces (SME 7 (*pers. Com*) 26 January 2017;). Following this objective, the government created the Sectorial Program of Public Security. Among other objectives, this program sought to align the capacities of the security forces to fight organised crime, combat impunity, improve the penitentiary system and incorporate information technologies into all the levels of law enforcement (Cámara de Diputados, 2008, p.5-7). Parallel to this strategy, the government worked to strengthen and professionalize the police agencies at different levels of the government (SME 25 (*pers.comm.*) 21 May 2019. This led to a considerable

increase in the budget allocated to the SSP, SEMAR and SEDENA (Islas 2013, pp.36-37). These actions led to the increase of resources of the security forces against the DTOs and, in response, there was an increase of the firepower capacities of the DTOs, leading to the escalation of violence.

In terms of organisational structures of public security, in 2007 the government consolidated the Federal Preventive Police into the Federal Police (López and Fonseca, 2013, p.70). The idea was to have one federal body under the SSP to coordinate security more efficiently with the local authorities. The subsequent Legislation of the Federal Police and the Law of the National System of Public Security that became effective in 2009 established requisites for the selection and evaluation of the federal police forces (Chabat 2010b, p.11). These procedures were created to ensure the legitimacy of the new police, and to reduce the possibilities of infiltration.

SME 15 mentions that during 2008 there were legal reforms in terms of the security apparatus. “Perhaps the most important of those was, precisely, the development of a new accusatory criminal system. The reforms that were included in this, were developed in the 2008 and, let’s say it had that the end was its implementation in eight years, that was until 2016.” (SME 15 (*pers.comm.*) 28 September 2018). These reforms changed the way to process criminals, founding general basis for the processes, establishing the need for the due process and the need for the professionalization of the police.

Additionally, SME 15 explains that this system was simplified because, until this reform, all the 32 states in Mexico had their own legal criminal procedures. This meant that a criminal could only be judged under the state code in which he/she had committed the crime. The reform implemented a national code for criminal procedures. In terms of the due process, if it is not followed, the case does not proceed. SME 15 also mentions it has a negative part because criminals have the right to be freed if the due process was violated. However, the benefit is that it calls for a scenario in which the police and first responders will all have professional training. (SME 15 (*pers.comm.*) 28 September 2018)

Regarding the use of technology, the government invested in the development of “Plataforma México” which is a virtual platform that includes a national database with information on criminals and stolen goods. It could be accessed and fed by the different police offices in Mexico (López and Fonseca, 2013, p.71). However, the database was dependant on the registries made by the police, meaning that if the local police did not upload their registers, the database was not as efficient as it could be. Still, the database would allow operative personnel to have access and verify information related to possible criminals and crimes.

Concerning international relations and cooperation, SME 7 emphasised that there were important efforts and collaboration with the United States (SME 7 (*pers. Com*) 26 January 2017). In 2008, the United States began the Merida Initiative. As presented by the Department of State (DOS, 2012, para. 1) “The Merida Initiative is an unprecedented partnership between the United States and Mexico to fight organised crime and associated violence while furthering respect for human rights and the rule of law. Based on principles of common and shared responsibility, mutual trust, and respect for sovereign independence,

the two countries' efforts have built confidence that is transforming the bilateral relationship.”

It is essential to clarify that this did not include the deployment of U.S. military personnel or the implementation of joint operations between the security forces of the U.S. and Mexico on Mexican territory. Instead, it was a program created for capacity building and institutional strengthening to which the U.S. government has contributed 2.5 billion dollars since 2008. In this respect, SME 15 (SME 15 (*pers.comm.*) 28 September 2018) explains that

“the Merida Initiative was a fundamental subject for Mexico because it started the information sharing. The U.S. started providing resources to the Mexican government, and those resources were important specially in capacitation. Specially in kind. I mean the armament, technology, for example the black hawk helicopters, I think it was the first time that the Mexican government acquired them.”

Under this partnership, the United States provided Mexico with financing and technology to improve the public security capacities of Mexico.

Following all these policies, it could be said that “capacity building” was one characteristic of the Calderón Administration. Another characteristic was the strategic attack against the DTOs; Calderón was trying to diminish the strength of the criminal groups like the Zetas (Benitez, 2017, p. 134). To accomplish that goal his administration focused on talking the DTOs leaders. During the administration, the government arrested or killed 46 drug leaders, including Heriberto Lazcano, who died in 2012 during a shootout (Redaccion, 2012). Additionally, in 2007 the extradition of Osiel Cardenas ended his leadership in the Gulf cartel and eventually lead to its fracture with the Zetas cartel as explained in Chapter 4.

It could be argued that the government did as much as it could to improve the security forces and deploy them together to ensure the success of the strategy. However, as observed in the homicide statistics, from 2007 onwards, the violence spiked. This could be understood in two different ways: the first one is that the violence shows how the government failed on reducing violence and therefore the power of criminal structures. The second one refers to the capacities and actions. Until this Administration, the federal government had never fought the DTOs with such strength. The retaliation is natural, and it demonstrates the will of the DTOs to escalate conflict and defend themselves; considering the constant flow of revenue proceeding from the U.S. drug market, as well as the abundant availability of weapons in the U.S., they were in the position to increase their firepower as much as they needed.

### **Security Strategies during President's Peña administration 2012-2018**

The security strategy implemented during President Peña's administration is interesting in the sense that, in his campaign, he promised one thing and then ended up doing another thing. As stated in SME 24, Peña' Public Security Strategy “had two main goals: diminish violence, and to re-establish conditions for ordered pacific community lives for all



Mexicans” (SME 24 (*pers.comm.*) 21 May 2019). These were appropriate goals considering the results of Calderón’s administration in terms of the escalation of violence. However, the process may not have been the adequate.

SME 15 (SME 15 (*pers.comm.*) 28 September 2018) mentioned that Peña had said he would radically change the security public policy, but in practice this did not happen. SME 6 argues that Peña’s Government “did not have a key strategy, they included a lot of people from the past administration. They reduced the confrontations and the seizures. There was no de-articulation of the criminal organisations” ((SME 6 (*pers.comm.*) 19 January 2018)

SME 7 reflected on the possibility that that at the beginning the new administration “had this misconception that the problem was in how the initiatives were managed and administered and not in the complexity of the problem and the lack of support from local and state authorities” (SME 7 (*pers. Com*) 26 January 2017)

In addition, SME 7 stated that what happened was that, at the beginning of the administration, the government changed two main things. The first was that they dissolved the Secretary of Public Security and merged the Federal Police under the Secretary of Government; this “politicized the security department, the Federal Police in particular.” The second was that cooperation with the U.S. authorities decreased. However, this situation was later healed and went back to normal through the continuation of the Merida Initiative.

Regarding the first point, SME 25 explicated that the SSP was included in the SEGOB. When this happened, the SEGOB “became in charge of the National System of Public Security and at the same time became responsible for the development of interior security policies, prevention of crime and the penal system, border vigilance tasks, and civil protection” among others (SME 25 (*pers.comm.*) 21 May 2019).

Peña Nieto created the National Gendarmerie with the intention to have a specialized body for law enforcement. However, SME 15 “[Peña] stated that it [the Gendarmerie] was going to be a master body for public security in the country, it [The Gendarmerie] ended, I know that well, with almost 5,000 elements. That is, he had said it would had like 30 thousand, 40 thousand elements, I can’t remember the precise number, and it ended with 5 or 6 thousand elements, as one division more of the Federal Police, and truth is the National Gendarmerie does not necessarily carry out substantial functions like the other divisions” (SME 15 (*pers.comm.*) 28 September 2018)

Summarizing his security policies, he never stopped the military operations. SME 15 ((*pers.comm.*) 28 September 2018) suggests that President Peña kept the strategy to take down the leaders of the criminal organisations through the list of priority targets. He did not generate radical changes in terms of the interaction between the military deployments and the cartels, this is perhaps because, as Poiré mentions, at the beginning the administration blamed the violence in the previous administration of the strategies without realising the great complexity of the problem.

Hereof, SME 24 states that the difference between Peña’s and Calderón’s strategy was “HOW their strategies should be executed. President Calderón strengthened the

Secretary of Public Security, with according budget and political support for his Secretary. Meanwhile, President Peña dismantled such Secretary and reordered public security functions within Secretary of Government. From my perspective, such institutional changes resulted in loss of continuity, and subordination of budget and political support for public security to the usual political-electoral game played at the Secretary of Government. As such, both main goals of President Peña were unreachable, resulting in an unstoppable increasing of violence since 2017.” (SME 24 (*pers.comm.*) 21 May 2019)

Similar to SME 24, the answers of SME 28 expressed that both administrations had the objective of diminishing the power and violent demonstrations of the DTOs. SME 28 states that part of the security strategy involved to increase the LEAs capacities against the criminal organisations. However, he acknowledges that the Calderon’s and Peña’ strategies “were not successful due to the corruption in all levels of government, the co-optation by the cartels to the authorities has expanded to such high levels never seen before, this has not allowed the strategies to function in a better way. Also, the lack of a strategy against the financial activities of the drug cartels have not allowed this fight against cartels to be more effective” (SME 28 (*pers.comm.*) 19 September 2019).

SME 28 made an emphasis in corruption as one of the factors that had undermined the security strategies. At this point, I had the opportunity to observe how the mayor strategies were planned by listening to the assessments made by the intelligence community and to those agencies experts on the matter. However, the implementation fails because, just as SME mentioned, such high levels of corruption had never been seen in Mexico. At this point, the obstacles faced at the moment of implementing the strategies give us an example of the expansion of corruption and impunity in Mexico, meaning that it become a more corrupted country than it was before.

#### **4.9 The role of violence and impunity**

At the beginning of this chapter, I pointed out the dynamics of violence between the cartels, including attacks and family quarrels between the groups. Additionally, it was explained that the loss of powerful leadership can lead to fracture and violence between different factions of the same organisation. At this time, the variable to be consider is not the inter-cartel relations, but violence per se, and the role it plays in the dynamics between governmental policies and the development of the DTOs.

This consideration is mainly linked to the role that violence has played in Mexico since 2006. After Calderón took office and began a new counter-narcotics strategy, the number of homicides showed an unprecedented increase in Mexico. For the purpose of observing the homicides, I collected the statistics presented by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, 2019) to create the annual statistics of homicides. Moreover, I found that INEGI had the statistics per state per month, so I took those instead.

After gathering the statistics for the period 1990-2016, I generated a chart contrasting the states’ measurements with the national total every month since 1990-2016.

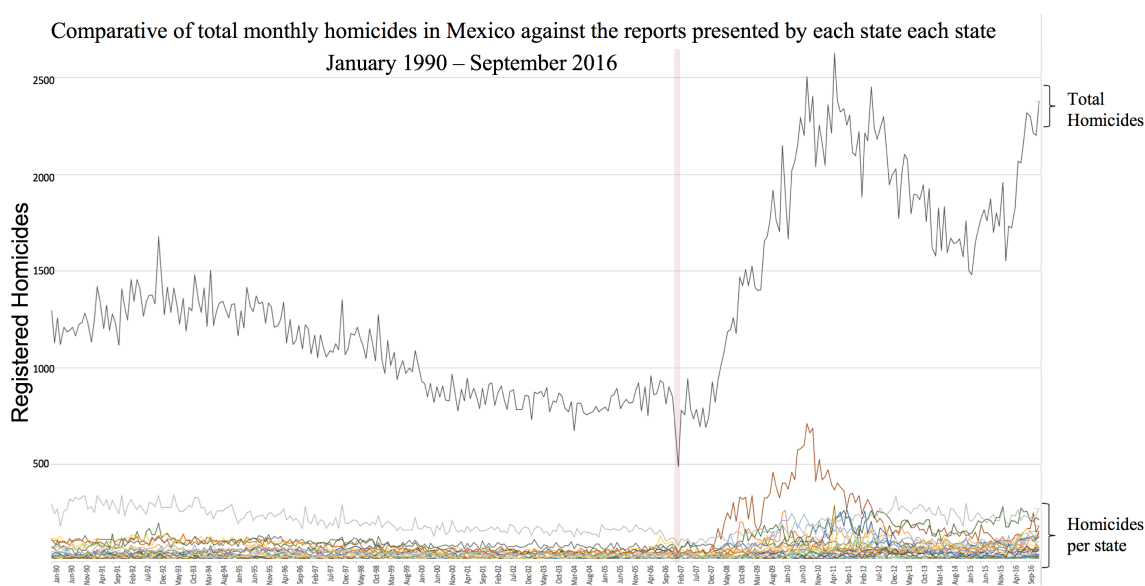
A small version of this chart can be observed in Figure 11, and in Appendix 3 which presents an additional figure considering only the “per state” numbers.

The first that I noted was that there is no generalized violence in Mexico, there are some states with large amounts of violence. Observing the states with high levels of violence, they concur with the places of interest of the units of analysis, particularly Chihuahua, Baja California, Sinaloa, Durango, Nuevo León during the period of violence that started in 2008. The relevance of this observation is that it permits the observation of localized violence, which considered within the history of DTOs developed before, shows the areas of interests of the cartels.

At the same time, it is helpful to comprehend security policies inside the precise historical context. By August 2006, Michoacán homicide rates had grown in an unprecedented way, which explains the decision of president Calderón to deploy the military in December of the same year. Additionally, after the military deployments, most of the homicide trends fell between January and February 2007. At that time, during the first 100 days of the new security policy, the numbers reported by the end of February showed a drastic decrease of violence in Mexico. Additionally, the lines of violence of all states except Mexico City and Estado de Mexico had shrunk by the end of 2007. This situation would have been perceived as a success of the new security policies, which explains why the policy continued for 2008.

The beginning of the 2006 counternarcotic policy can be considered a critical juncture. The sharp decrease of homicides in most of the states of Mexico, and in the overall curve of total homicides is an example of an alteration in the demonstration of violence by the DTOs. In this regard, the beginning of the strategy cause an initial shrinking of the violence in Mexico. However, in the long run, this could be considered the beginning of a generalized wave of violence and homicides that has been constantly increasing since 2006.

Figure 11 Homicides in Mexico per state per month from 1990-2016



Source: Created by the author with information from INEGI, 2019.

Regardless of the efforts from the authorities, Figure 11 shows that in 2008 the criminal violence escalated again. The most violent state was Chihuahua, where the Juarez cartel was defending its border point. The peaks in 2010 are also related to the increase of homicides in Sinaloa, Baja California, Tamaulipas, the home of the main cartels the Sinaloa cartel, the Tijuana cartel, The Gulf and Zetas cartels, respectively. This discovery calls for an in-depth analysis that contrasts the lines of violence and understands it within the evolution of the DTOs in each state. However, for my research, it shows that regardless of the national statistics, the cartels had localized conflicts in particular places of Mexico.

An example of the escalation of this violence is the case of Tamaulipas in August 2010. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of August, the authorities discovered 72 bodies of Central American migrants in a ranch in Tamaulipas, the massacre was attributed to the Zetas (Presidencia de la República, 2010). I was working in the Office of the Media at the Presidency that day, covering the news. Every hour the number of bodies increased and it was shocking for me at that time to believe that any criminal group will act with such impunity. As I came to understand later, this was a message of the Zetas, who were at that consolidating their power in the region.

This episode can also be observed in Figure 11, where it can be seen that August 2010 is the second most violent month in the period observed. Tamaulipas registered 139 homicides that month (INEGI 2019), from which 72 were the migrants. The month before the authorities found 70 bodies in different places in the metropolitan area of Monterrey, Nuevo León (El Universal, 2009). A proof of the conflict between the Zetas and the Gulf cartel.

Additionally, these mass killing events are proof of the stage of how empowered were the Zetas at that time. They were openly defying the constitutional order, killing innocent people to make a clear message about their fearless intentions. In a parallel situation, we need to acknowledge the corruption and impunity developed in Tamaulipas. The best examples of this decomposition are observed through the cases of the indicted governors Tomas Yarrington (DOJ-Southern District of Texas, 2013) and Eugenio Hernandez (DOJ-Southern District of Texas, 2015a). Both governors were involved in illicit activities, directly or indirectly allowing the empowerment of the DTOs.

During the Peña administration, the situation got worse. In words of SME 15 “if you observe the dynamic of homicides, better said the Mexican homicide rate, it is very interesting because from December 2012, that Peña Nieto took office, until mid 2014 there is an important decrease [of homicides], but from 2014 until 2018 that we are now, not only did it [the homicide rate] increased to equal the levels observed with Calderon, but the numbers went beyond [Calderón’s administration homicide rate]” (SME 15 (*pers.comm.*) 28 September 2018)

This situation goes hand by hand with the development of conflicts between the various actors involved. At this point, I build on Islas (2019b) who identifies five different causes of violence in the Mexican war on drugs: “1) Inter-cartel conflicts; 2) Intra-cartel

conflicts; 3) Cartel versus gangs; 4) Cartels versus the state; 5) Cartel versus the society.” The first three are interactions inside the illicit system and people involved in crime, while the last two are in direct retaliation to non-criminal actors.

The beginning of this chapter elaborated on the conflicts between the cartels and inside their organisations as something that can be independent of the happenings of the illicit world (for example, Chapo’s rivalry against other former Guadalajara cartel factions). The violence related to cartel versus the state is linked to the implementation of the security policies, the multiple military deployments and the continuation of the strategies focused on arresting the leadership of the big cartels. Therefore, the military operatives provoked a retaliation from the cartels against members of the LEA that spilled over to the public population. The continued loss of leadership generated further fractures in all criminal structures producing more inner-cartel and intra-cartel conflicts.

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the 1980s can be seen as a decade of the consolidation of a narcotraffic oligarchy, one that led their own groups during the 1990s and the 2000s. Apart from the Gulf cartel, the rest of the leaders of the cartels in the 1990s had the same origin in the Guadalajara Cartel, and a shared history before becoming drug lords. The drug lords in Mexico share a history of grievances and vengeance of their own, independent of the evolution in the licit world.

The most relevant conclusion that can be observed in this chapter is that there is a part of the evolution of the DTOs in Mexico that is unique to the cartels, and which depends on the interaction between its drug-lords. This factor is important because when there is a quarrel the cartels retaliate by attacking other cartel’s territories. Furthermore, this demonstrates that the cartels are motivated not only by economic greed, but also by grievances. If there are family grievances, the violence will not stop between the groups even if the government seizes all the group’s assets.

Furthermore, the arrests and assassinations are significant because it affects family members within the organisation. In the history of Mexican DTOs, it can be said that violent turf wars often begin when members of the family are affected. The assassination of Hector Luis Palma’s family, the arrest and later assassination of Joaquín Guzman’s brother, and the attack against Rodolfo Beltran Leyva were all examples that provoked violent retaliations between the DTOs involved.

The illicit DTO system in Mexico went through significant changes during the 2000s. The Sinaloa cartel was committed to expand its territories by invading and fighting rival cartels. This led to several inter-cartel conflicts that raised the level of violence in Mexico. Parallely, the Gulf cartel created the Zetas from military special forces. This radically changed the way in which the cartels carried out violence because it forced the other cartels to raise their defensive capacities and create and professionalize their own security forces. The conflict between the groups grew to the point in which the Mexican government began a “war on drugs” that caused further escalation of DTO-related violence.

The strategy of the War on Drugs implemented in 2006 was a measure to contain the power of the DTOs and the violence that was starting to spread in different states of Mexico. I believe that this represented a critical juncture as well because it caused further pressure in the criminal organizations, having the side effect of increasing the violence. At this point, the initial idea that the Calderon strategy could work was supported by the immediate reduction of homicides that can be seen in Figure 11. However, as it was explained in the first part of this chapter, the conflict between the DTOs and the loss of leadership caused by the governmental strategies lead to an increase in the conflicts between members of the same cartels, between different cartels, and last but not least, between the cartels the government authorities.

As the government pushed against the cartels, the Sinaloa, the Gulf and the Zetas cartel expanded south, first to the Central American countries and then to the Andean region. The next chapter presents a detailed analysis of the parallel international circumstances that took place during the 1990s and the 2000s when the cartels acquired a relevant role in the Central American criminal structures. The next chapter shows how the cartels gained their transnational criminal power in Latin America, consolidating a strong presence in countries like Guatemala.

## **Chapter 5 Proximate regional variables that affected the cartels' behaviour**

### **5.1 Introduction**

While I was working as a security analyst in the government, I learnt that the accuracy of the analysis depends also on the skills of the analyst. A main skill is the ability of the analysts to recognise the variables that interact with the issue that is being analysed. A second skill refers to the ability to analyse the interactions between variables that may not seem related at first, but that have the capacity of influencing the outcomes. The present chapter presents how different exogenous international variables affected the empowerment and expansion of the Mexican cartels in the Americas. By understanding the international power that the Mexican DTOs achieved in the cocaine trafficking from Colombia to the U.S., this chapter sets the bases to understand the perceptions that this cartel has in the world.

The identification of the independent variables was done based on the work of previous authors mentioned in the literature review including Astorga (1999a, 2003 and 2015), Bailey (2014), Bailey and Chabat (2002) Mejía et al. (2014) and Benítez (2010 and 2016). I noticed that these authors identify mainly four exogenous variables that facilitated the international activities of the Mexican DTOs in the Americas. The first variable was the reduction of the trans-Atlantic heroine flow to the U.S. during the 1970s. The second was the weakening of the Colombian DTOs during the 1980s and 1990s. The third was the pacification of the civil conflicts in Central America, and the fourth referred to the constancy in the U.S. demand for cocaine.

The first part of this chapter is dedicated to explaining each independent variable, developing how they affected the international position of the Mexican DTOs. In terms of the sources, the first variable is based in unclassified and declassified documents that were recommended by SMEs with expertise on the subject. The data for the explanation of the second variable came mainly from the interviews of the SMEs. The data for the explanation of the third variable was sourced from historic publications. Finally, the data for the fourth variable was collected from the official U.S. drug-consumption statistics.

In addition to explain each variable separately, the main purpose of this chapter is to create a multiple triangulation to explain how each variable became entangled with the others, creating an interrelated sequence of events that allowed the international expansion of the Mexican cartels. I used the puzzle approach to create visual explanations of how identified critical junctures interacted and affected the evolution of the Sinaloa, the Gulf and the Zetas cartels. At this point, this chapter explains the origins of a strong international power that was acquired by the Mexican DTOs in the cocaine trafficking routes to the U.S.

### **5.2 The regional variables**

#### **The reduction of the Heroin flow from Europe.**

During the 1970s, the US under President Nixon began a counter narcotics campaign with the intention of influencing the international licit community to tackle the production and consumption of drugs. According to the archives of the DEA (n.d.B, p.32), until the

1970s, most of the heroine consumed in the U.S. came from Turkey and it was trafficked by the DTOs based in France. As part of the international support to U.S. efforts, during this decade Turkey banned poppy production and the French government worked successfully to reduce heroin labs situated in France. The events in Turkey and France had, as a collateral effect, an increase in the production of heroin in Mexico to meet the U.S. demand. According to a de-classified document of the CIA, Mexico became the main supplier of heroin during the 1970s (CIA, 1983, p.1) The constant demand for opiates in the U.S. represented secure revenues for the those involved in the trafficking. Given this situation, the reduction of the Turkish supply increased the market possibilities for Mexican heroin producers.

This sequence of events taking place in Turkey and France was the principal reason for the rise in heroin production in Mexico, which increased 70% between 1971 and 1975 (Bagley, B & Walker, W. 1994 p. 192). This was a pivotal turning point in the organisation of drug traffickers in Mexico because these changes in the international market of opiates pushed the DTOs of the time to develop more complex capacities. To fulfil the demand, the suppliers needed to expand not only the production, but also their transport and logistics capacities to smuggle the drugs. At the same time, it also meant enlarging their management and administrative skills, which transformed local producers and traffickers into more organised criminal enterprises.

Following the new role of Mexico as the primary supplier of heroin to the U.S., Chabat (2000, pp. 3-4) explains the characteristics of U.S. foreign policy towards Mexico in regard to the drug issue during the 1980s. The U.S. focused on poppy and marihuana eradication by pressuring the Mexican Government to prioritise counternarcotic efforts. Moreover, during the 1980s the U.S. pressured Mexico to reduce the illicit cultivation of poppy. The counter narcotic efforts of the Mexican authorities produced a drastic reduction of poppy cultivation in Mexico during the 1980s, After the implementation poppy eradication policies the Mexican traffickers paid more attention to Guatemala. According to the CIA (1983, p.3) the poppy crops in Guatemala “appeared to represent an effort by Mexican growers to escape the Mexican eradication campaign.” These efforts were assisted by the Mexican traffickers who would provide the seeds and technical assistant at the same time they monitored the crops near the border with Mexico.

### **The situation in Colombia and the cocaine flow**

In a parallel scenario during the 1980s, the illicit drug market in the U.S. had created great opportunities for the Colombian cartels who trafficked cocaine. The consolidation of Medellin Cartel under the leadership of Pablo Escobar was possible thanks to the increase of the cocaine production in Colombia and the increasing demand in the U.S. market. In the words of SME 19, “In the days of the mega cartels, Pablo Escobar, the Cali Cartel, you had fewer but much larger and more powerful cartels, they controlled drugs from cultivation, production, conversion from coca paste into cocaine hydro-chloride, to transportation, to distribution, in the United States.” (*pers.comm.*) 21 August 2018)

At the same time, the introduction of crack cocaine can be considered a critical juncture because it changed the illicit market and caused further counternarcotic efforts. As



explained by the DEA, “Never before had any form of cocaine been available at such low prices and at such high purity. More important from a marketing standpoint, it produced an instant high and its users become addicted in a very short time” (DEA, n.d.B, P.58). Soon, the number of crack-cocaine labs in South Florida increased, demonstrating the rising business opportunities for the coca producers. At the same time, this increased the power of Colombian DTOs, it also raised concerns among U.S. authorities.

To control the situation, the U.S. government created the South Florida Task Force, announced by president Reagan in 1982, and the National Narcotics Border Interdiction System (NNBIS) headed by Vice President George Bush. This task force was a multi-agency effort that responded to the high levels of criminality and drug trafficking rates observed (DEA n.d.A, P.48). The efforts of the Task Force and the NNBIS focused on the cocaine route through the Caribbean Sea. The sequence of this events is relevant because without a significant decrease in the demand, the closure of the Caribbean route forced the traffickers to use new locations for transshipment, leading the Colombians and Mexicans to become partners in the trafficking business.

Under these circumstances, the cooperation between the Colombian and the Mexican DTOs gained extraordinary relevance for the trafficking logistics. This partnership allowed the Colombian cartels to rely on their Mexican counterparts when the Caribbean route was shut down. In other words, the more the U.S. worked to halt the trafficking routes through the Caribbean, the closer the partnership between the Colombian and the Mexican DTOs became. Eventually, Mexico became the principal route for the supply of cocaine to the U.S. (Bagley, 2012, pp.6-7; UNODC, 2011, p.50; Beittel, 2015, p.8, Chabat, 2000, p.3). What is more, the Colombians reduced their role as international traffickers. This historical juncture is particularly important because it changed the status quo of the illicit actors of the region and at the same time forced the inclusion of new actors into the international organised criminal activities.

Considering the constant efforts of the illicit actors and the outcome of the U.S. strategy in the Caribbean, it can be said that the strategy had the effect of forcing the cartels to improve their international collaboration and maximize their efforts. At the same time, the geostrategic position occupied by the Mexican traffickers brought them immense power over the rest of the DTOs of the region. It was a powerful coincidence that they became the best option to traffic cocaine into the U.S. due to their control of the border crossings and their previous knowledge and network of opiates trafficking.

Due to this sequence of events, the Mexican DTOs were highly incentivised to improve their cocaine trafficking capacities to the U.S. The revenue from cocaine trafficking gave unseen corrupting power to the drug traffickers (Chabat 2010b, p.1). This situation pushed the DTOs, particularly the Guadalajara cartel, to grow as an organisation. At the same time the cartel needed to improve its logistics and trafficking capabilities, the cocaine trafficking provided unprecedented economic assets to do it.

By the end of the 1980s, Pablo Escobar had gained the role as the most prominent drug lord in the region. In this regard, SME 27 ((*pers.comm.*) 27 August 2019) explains that Pablo Escobar and the Medellin cartel controlled all the cocaine business, from the coca

cultivation to the supply in other countries. At the same time, he also became a violent leader who carried out terrorist attacks and kidnapped public figures in his fight against the Colombian authorities (DEA, n.d.C, p.77). The relevance of Escobar to this research is the sequence of events that he generated.

His strategy of violence and terror was overwhelmed the capacity of the Colombian authorities, so they sought international collaboration with the United States. The security agencies of both countries worked together at the tactical and strategic levels in Colombia to take Escobar down. These bi-national efforts resulted in the death of Pablo Escobar in 1993 (Clark, 2016, loc. 1147) which lead to the downfall of the Medellin cartel. SME 27 states that this change allowed the “Cali cartel to take over until it too was dismantled in 1995” (Exert 27 (*pers.comm.*) 27 August 2019). But the joint counter narcotic efforts later dismantled the Cali cartel.

After both cartels were gone, the monopoly that the Colombians had on cocaine trafficking was broken and different actors took over. As explained by SME 19 (2018) after the end of the Cali and Medellin cartels,

“Colombian cartels no longer control the entire cycle of cocaine. Much of that has been taken over by Mexican cartels, which have infiltrated into Central America. So now, much of the primary flow of cocaine to the US is sold in Colombia, to a member of another, smaller cartel, either the ones in Mexico or Central America [...], They control the movement to the United States, and through their connections with gangs and other elements in the United States, they control distribution in the United States. It has become a more decentralized, less monolithic approach.” (SME 19 (*pers.comm.*) 21 August 2018)

The sequence of events that took place in Colombia were completely independent of the Mexican cartels. However, as the Colombian cartels saw a decrease in their criminal power, the Mexicans were increasing their control on cocaine trafficking in Latin America. It is noticeable that Pablo Escobar’s assassination occurred in the 1990s, after the dissolution of the Guadalajara cartel in Mexico. In this sense, the end of the two-cartel system in Colombia benefited the increasing power that Mexican DTOs were consolidating in the cocaine routes to the U.S.

### **The pacification of Central America and the intrusion of the Mexican DTOs**

The Pacification of the civil conflicts can be observed as a confounding variable because it was an enabler to connect independent variables like the end of the bi-cartel system in Colombia, with the Latin American expansion of the Mexican DTOs as the dependent variable. The end of the civil wars in Central America was relevant to the international empowerment of the Mexican DTOs because during the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, Central America was an unstable region marked by social conflicts. As presented by Demombynes (2011, p.1):

“Armed conflicts vary in length and characteristics across countries of Central America. Guatemala suffered a civil war spanning four decades, from 1960 to 1996, with levels of violence peaking in the early 1980s. The conflict between government forces and insurgent groups spill over into the non-combatant population and disproportionately affected the indigenous population, which bore more than 80 per cent of casualties (Guatemalan Commission for Historical Classification 1999). Nicaragua experienced two different conflicts: the 1975-1979 civil war between the Somoza dictatorship and the Sandinista insurgency and the 1980-90 contra war between the Sandinista government and CIA-backed contra forces. In El Salvador, where a left-wing insurgent force fought a military government and death squads from 1980-1991, 80 per cent of resulting deaths are estimated to be civilian (United Nations 1992).”.

Although the region was finally pacified during the 1990s, it was devastated. The lack of governmental order in the previous decades had also generated the lack of implementation of development programs. This had triggered low levels of development and poverty. At the same, due to the weakness of the governmental structures, the countries in the region were not prepared to avoid the rise of illegal structures in the region (Islas, 2013, pp.57-58). With this condition, and the increasing power of Mexican DTOs explained in Chapter 4, the establishment of a cocaine route through Central America was a process without many obstacles. The countries had just come out of civil conflicts, the trust of the authorities had eroded and there was no human development for its inhabitants. In this new scenario, the law enforcement agents, who had been fighting the rebel groups, found a new actor in the Mexican DTOs, one with a highly corruptive power. The lack of development led to the empowerment of the criminal organisations because they could offer constant profits to populations severely damaged by the civil war.

In a more detailed observation, Guatemala became the first country to observe a significant intrusion of the Mexican cartels. This situation is explained by Espach et al (2011, p.8) in his analysis about DTOs in Guatemala's border zones. The authors maintain that Guatemala became the alternative for cocaine trafficking when the U.S. authorities tackled the Caribbean routes at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. At the same time, the end of the Civil War in Guatemala during the 1990s meant an opportunity to establish drug trafficking organizations to smuggle cocaine to North America. Coincidentally, the role that Colombian cartels had as main actors in the cocaine routes until the mid 1990s was substituted by the Mexican cartels. Their expansion was so fast that at the beginning of the 2000s the Sinaloa and the Gulf cartels had consolidated networks in the country.

The Sinaloa and the Gulf cartel had presence in Guatemala during the 2000s, where they trafficked cocaine coming from Colombia. In 2008 local criminals started stealing shipments of the cartels, which caused violent retaliations (Espach et al., 2011, p.11-13). This led to attacks not only against the local criminals, but between the

Mexican DTOs, where the Zetas, still under the Gulf cartel, attacked members of the Sinaloa cartel for the control of trafficking routes. After the independence of the Zetas, their presence in Guatemala did not diminished, on the contrary, they used violence to try to increase their power in the region. the Zetas broke with the Gulf, their presence These episodes of violence corroborated the presence of the Sinaloa, the Gulf, the Zetas cartel in the region.

Following the historic developments in Mexico, the beginning of the 2010s observed two main organizations, the Sinaloa and the Zetas cartel. Their expansion to Guatemala and its southern Central American neighbours was explained by Mazzitelli (2011, p.15). He states that the Sinaloa cartel has strong presence controlling the cocaine routes that go through the western shores of the countries. At the same time, the Zetas controlled those routes traveling through the east using the Caribbean coast. These two groups are the main actors in the supply chain that feeds the unstoppable demand in the U.S.

### **Cocaine Consumption in the U.S.**

The consumption in the U.S. can be considered as a confounding variable because it affects independent variables like the development of DTOs in Colombia, as well as the evolution of the Mexican DTOs. Furthermore, in contrast with counter narcotic policies the demand is not something that can be planned, it just exists, creating a link between the transnationalization interests of the Mexican DTOs and the trafficking opportunities exogenous to Mexico. The relevance of the cocaine consumption is that that it serves as the incentive for trafficking. It can be said that if there is demand, the supply will find its way. To analyse this situation, Table 4 presents information recovered partly from the Data Supplement 2015 of the National Drug Control Strategy (The White House 2015, p.24). Due to methodological changes in data collection expressed in the table, it is not possible to directly compare the period 1979-1998 with 1999-2001 or with the period after 2002. However, there are important observations to be made from the individual periods, before proceeding with the integration of the puzzle in the next section.

The first observation relates to the high consumption of cocaine between 1979 and 1988. This consumption served as a major incentive to the Colombian cartels to expand their trafficking operations and seek international partners. At the same time, for the Mexican DTOs, it represented an opportunity to begin the trafficking of cocaine through a partnership with the Colombians. This trend is an example of how the demand is not only an incentive for trafficking, but it also encourages the creation of international business agreements between illicit actors from different countries.

The second observation refers to the consumption of marihuana during the first period, it can be observed that during the 1990s the number of users kept relatively stable. This was yet another incentive for the Mexican cartels to continue their efforts in marihuana production and trafficking. The same is observed with the data of lifetime heroin users, which saw an increase of more than 50% in the number of users. The point about both drugs is that while the dynamics in the illicit world were changing during the 1990s, the demand

for drugs kept relatively constant, which means that the incentive for their existence was never removed.

Table 4 Cocaine consumption in the US

Year	Ages 12 or Older, estimated number in thousands.								
	Current Use of any Illicit Drug	Current marijuana use	Current cocaine use	Marijuana use past year	Cocaine use past year	Heroin use past year	Lifetime heroin use	Lifetime cocaine use	Lifetime marijuana use
1979	25,400	23,800	4,700				2,300		
1982		21,500	4,500				1800		
1985	23,300	18,600	5,700				1,800		
1988	15,000	12,400	3,100				1,700		
1990	13,500	10,900	1,700				1,500		
1991	13,400	10,400	2,000				2,400		
1992	12,000	9,700	1,400				1,700		
1993	12,300	9,600	1,400				2,100		
1994	12,600	10,100	1,400				2,100		
1995	12,800	9,800	1,500				2,500		
1996	13,000	10,100	1,700				2,400		
1997	13,900	11,100	1,500				2,000		
1998	13,600	11,000	1,800				2,400		
1999	13,829	10,458	1,552				3,054		
2000	14,027	10,714	1,213				2,779		
2001	15,910	12,122	1,676				3,091		
2002	19,522	14,584	2,020				3,668		
2003	19,470	14,638	2,281				3,744		
2004	19,071	14,576	2,021				3,145		
2005	19,720	14,626	2,397				3,534		
2006	20,387	14,849	2,426				3,788		
2007	19,892	14,470	2,077				3,806		
2008	20,123	15,269	1,865				3,795		
2009	21,930	16,826	1,642				3,680		
2010	22,648	17,409	1,472				4,144		
2011	22,454	18,071	1,369	29,739	3,857	620	4,162	36,921	107,842
2012	23,863	18,855	1,650	31,513	4,671	669	4,565	37,688	111,239
2013	24,573	19,810	1,549	32,952	4,182	681	4,812	37,634	114,712
2014	26,983	22,188	1,530	35,124	4,553	914	4,813	39,200	117,213
2015		22,266	1,876	36,043	4,828	828	5,099	38,744	117,865
2016		23,981	1,874	37,570	5,071	948	4,981	38,880	118,524
2017				40,935	5,943	494	5,295	40,550	122,943
2018				43,486	5,529	354	5,108	40,194	123,935

Source: integrated by the author with the help of Karina Esmail, with information from The White House Data Supplement, 2014, 2015 and 2016; and SAHMSA, 2018.

The third observation is related to the increased number of cocaine consumers during the period 2002-2007 and the international counter narcotic efforts of the time. While the U.S. and Colombian governments had begun a new international agreement against criminal groups and the reduction of cocaine production, the consumption from U.S. society was not reduced. The vital point of this situation is that the coca bush used to produce cocaine can only be cultivated in the Andean Region of South America. Without a reduction of the demand the bilateral efforts to reduce the supply were always limited by the constant incentive provided by the demand.

### **5.3 Assembling the Puzzle and applying the theoretical approach**

The present section is going to analyse how the regional circumstances in Latin America, in combination with those in Mexico, played a direct or indirect role in the international empowerment of the three Mexican cartels that are of interest to this thesis. Through the analysis of these independent variables, it is possible to understand the circumstances in which the units of analysis transnationalise. The analysis of the variables is separated according to events and the decades in which these events took place. In other words, I analysed the impact of the critical junctures and the effect that these critical junctures had in the sequence of the following events according to its time.

At this point, the regional independent variables that took place in the 1980s created opportunities for the Mexican DTOs to emerge as relevant actors in drug trafficking to the U.S. The decrease in the supply of Eurasian heroin created a vacuum in the international illicit arena in terms of who would fulfil the U.S. opiate supply. At this point, the U.S. demand for heroin was a constant, but the supply chain from Europe had been affected. This represented a great business opportunity for the Mexican DTOs of the 1970s and 1980s, who increased the poppy production to be able to meet the U.S. demand for the drugs.

Mexican DTOs, mainly the Guadalajara cartel, focused on heroin and marihuana. In the mid 1980s the Guadalajara DTO started trafficking cocaine. It is relevant to notice that the Mexican initiation in cocaine trafficking was also related to the ongoing efforts of Colombian cartels to traffic cocaine to the U.S. This could be identified as the first trace of illicit international relations between two highly organised criminal actors in Latin America. The acknowledgment of this relationship is vital because from that moment onwards, the international cooperation between both the DTOs in both countries grew stronger.

At this point, the empowerment of the Guadalajara cartel in Mexico was also related to the cartel's relation with the Mexican security institutions. The cartel had a corruption network that aided to the smoothness of its criminal activities. However, this relation changed with the decentralization of the political power in Mexico. The decentralization of the political power in Mexico created power vacuums in the state-criminal relations. The new parties in power, who had little to no ruling experience, contributed to this process by fomenting further political plurality. The relations with the authorities demonstrate the existence of a previous hierarchical structure. This hierarchy was broken when different

corruption cases were exposed, while at the same time the centralised PRI structure collapsed. What this meant was that the arrival of a president from a different party also meant the alteration of the command of the security structures.

Additionally, the death of Kiki Camarena during the 1980s led to a crackdown on the Guadalajara cartel leadership. At the end of the 1980s the Guadalajara cartel divided into smaller units which began to establish their own relations with the local authorities. It is important to notice the path dependency of these new smaller units; as former components of the Guadalajara cartel, they had the know-how about the international network with its Colombian counterparts for cocaine trafficking.

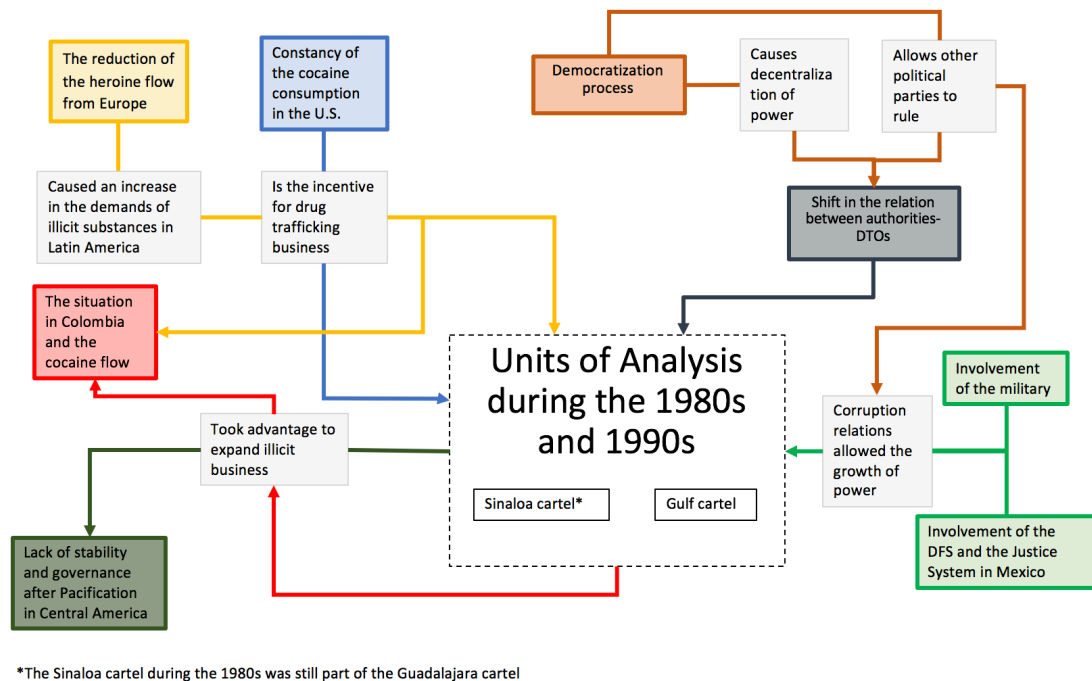
In parallel events in Colombia, at the end of the 1980s and the first years of the 1990s Pablo Escobar carried out a terror campaign against the governmental authorities. Due to this situation, the Colombian and the U.S. governments implemented joint strategies against Escobar. The joint efforts continued, ending the existence of the Medellin and the Cali cartels in the mid 1990s, which meant that there were no strong Colombian DTOs to administrate the routes to the U.S. This situation was welcomed by the Mexican DTOs, especially the Sinaloa and the Gulf cartels, who began their incursion into Central America to secure the cocaine routes from Colombia to Mexico.

Somehow, this new opportunity pushed the cartels to develop further logistics and coordination to transport higher amounts of cocaine. From a business perspective, the demand for cocaine was a constant, the supply chain had been disrupted and the Mexican cartels had two advantages. The first was the strategic location of Mexico as neighbour to the U.S., with the second being illicit networks that were already trafficking heroin and marihuana across the border; which could then be used to traffic cocaine. This situation can be graphically observed in Figure 12 that shows the different independent variables that affected the units of analysis during the 1980s and the 1990s. The boxes in the left side represent international variables, while the ones in the right side represent the Mexican variables.

Additional to this opportunity, during the 1990s there were three factors that came together to create an extraordinary opportunity for the cartels: the closure of the Caribbean route, the pacification of the Central American region and the end of the bi-cartel system in Colombia. When analysed together, these three variables explain the international expansion of the activities of the Mexican cartels.

The closure of the Caribbean cocaine drug route and the pacification of Central America had a big effect in the transnational aspirations of the Mexican cartels. On the one hand, the closure of the Caribbean route put additional pressure onto the Mexican cartels to expand their logistics to meet their role between the supply of cocaine coming from Colombia and the demand in the U.S. On the other hand, the end of the civil conflicts in Central America represented a great opportunity to create trafficking routes through the region. Countries like Guatemala and El Salvador had low levels of development and weak governmental institutions after the civil conflicts. These conditions made it a perfect alternative to the Caribbean cocaine route.

Figure 12 Puzzle of factors to understand the transnational behaviour of the Mexican cartels during 1980s and 1990s.



Source: Created by the author

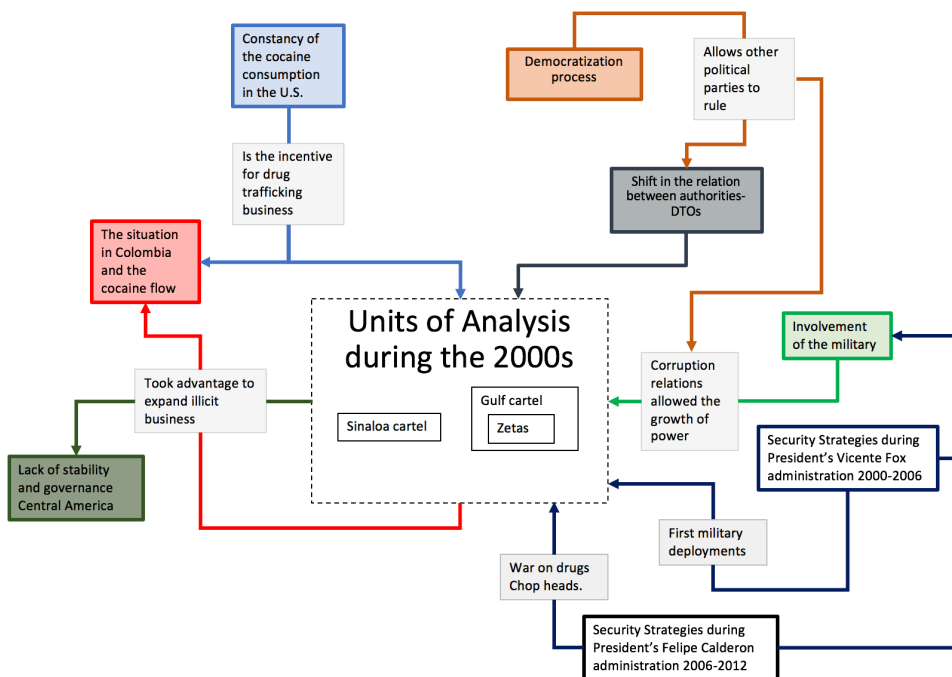
The reason why Central America is so important for the empowerment of the Mexican cartels refers also to the geographic characteristics of the region. The complicated topography and climate were an additional obstacle for the implementation of public policies. It is easier to build a road in a plain or a valley than to do it in the mountains or in the jungle. The same happens with the development of infrastructure and the application of law enforcement. The more complicated the topography, the more difficult to secure a perimeter, and the easier it was for drug traffickers to establish covert routes.

In parallel historic events, the disintegration of the Medellin and the Cali cartels during the mid 1990s left a power vacuum over the control of the shipping flow of cocaine from Colombia to the U.S. This vacuum was filled by the Mexican DTOs. As explained in Chapter 4, the Mexican DTOs began trafficking cocaine during the 1980s, and by the time the bi-cartel system disappeared in Colombia, the Mexicans had a comfortable position in the international cocaine trafficking business.

What is more, there is one fundamental difference between the evolution of the illicit actors of each country. In Colombia, the fall of the Cali and Medellin cartels represented the end of an era and the creation of a power vacuum about who would be in charge of the cocaine shipments to the U.S. In Mexico, the end of the Guadalajara cartel did not generate a power vacuum, it meant a generational change. It was the next generation that had grown up inside the Guadalajara organisation who now were in charge of their own smaller groups. They knew the logistics of the business and motivated them to expand their role at the international level.



Figure 13 Puzzle of factors to understand the transnational behaviour of the Mexican cartels during the 2000s



Source: Created by the author

During the next decade, as it can be observed in Figure 13, the Sinaloa and the Gulf cartels increased their power taking advantage of the constant demand for cocaine in the U.S. The northern countries of Central America remained vulnerable to the expansion of the Mexican DTOs. Furthermore, the Mexican DTOs took advantage of the weakness of the trafficking organizations in Colombia, and they consolidated their power as main the cocaine traffickers in the Americas. In the meantime, inside Mexico, the government implemented new counter narcotic policies to counter the strength of the Sinaloa and the Gulf cartels. The war on drugs began in 2006, and it provoked the Mexican cartels to increase their presence in Guatemala and Central America.

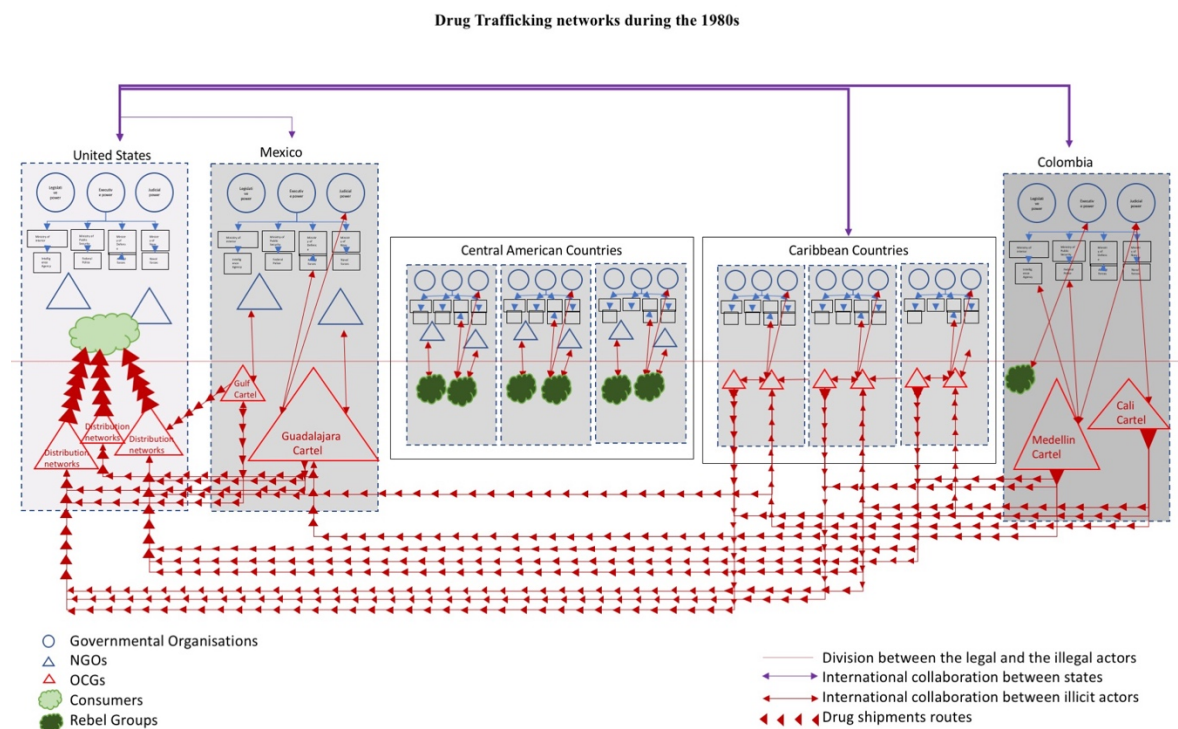
Hence, during the 1990s and the 2000s, the Mexican DTOs emerged and evolved as the leaders in the cocaine trafficking business to the U.S. To keep up with this new role, the DTOs required the development of better logistics and the innovation in the trafficking routes. It was a win-win situation for the cartels, because by expanding their organisations to control cocaine routes they also ensured a constant source of large revenues to increase their corruptive power in Mexico.

These regional changes in routes and players can be observed by applying the model proposed in Chapter 3. Figures 20, 21 and 22 exemplify how the DTO context changed in Latin America. The first figure shows the scenario observed in the 1980s. While Central America was submerged in civil conflicts, the main transshipment points in the region were through the Caribbean countries. The objective of the red lines with the red arrows is to show the complexity of the drug flow. The importance of its complexity relies in the

visualization of the problem and how it can be analysed. The use of a big arrow in drug maps (for an example see UNODC, 2019, pp.21 and 24) can jeopardize the analysis if the researchers do not understand the complexity of the routes and its players.

The cocaine route is a constant number of packages sent from one place to the other and it changes depending on the circumstances. During the 1980s, the flow of cocaine was a constant number of dissimilar packages to different Caribbean transshipment points on its way to the U.S. The relationship between Mexican and Colombian DTOs was mainly limited to the relations between the Guadalajara cartel and the Medellin cartel. The system was relatively linear when it is contrasted to the way it evolved in the following years. The main criminal relations were carried out between the major cartels in Mexico and in Colombia, while the role of criminal groups in other countries was to aid in the transshipment of the drug. The Central American countries were mainly left out of the routes because the civil conflicts made them too unstable to establish reliable partnerships with the illicit actors.

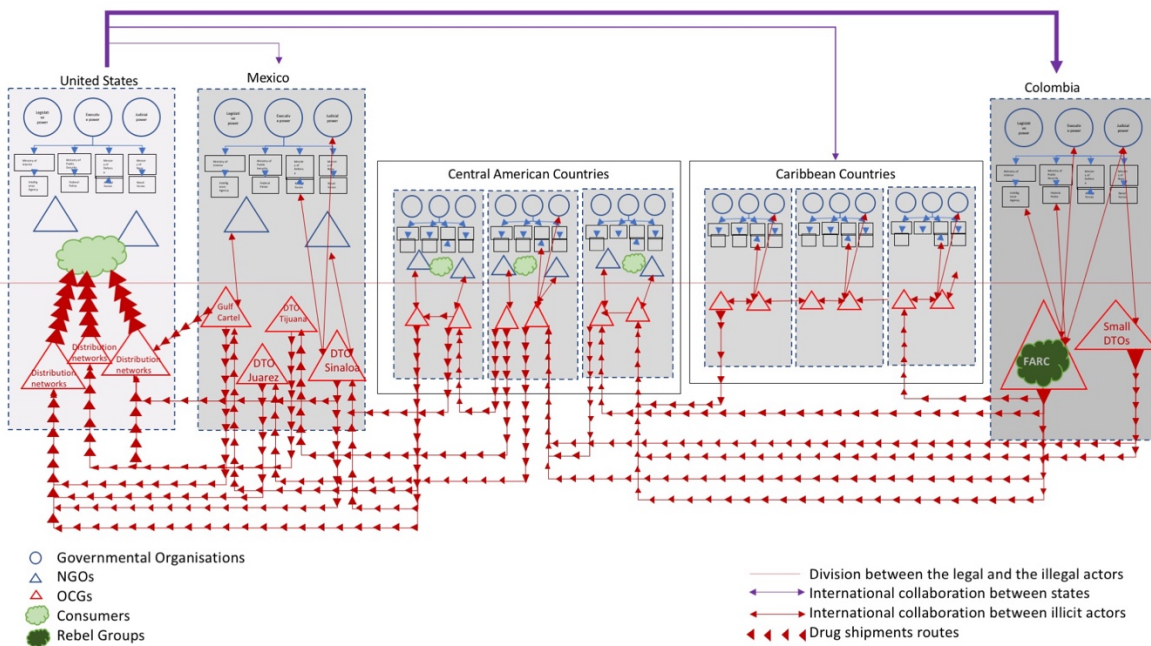
Figure 14 Drug trafficking of cocaine to the U.S. during the 1980s<sup>5</sup>



Source: created by the author

Figure 15 Drug trafficking of cocaine to the U.S. during the 1990s

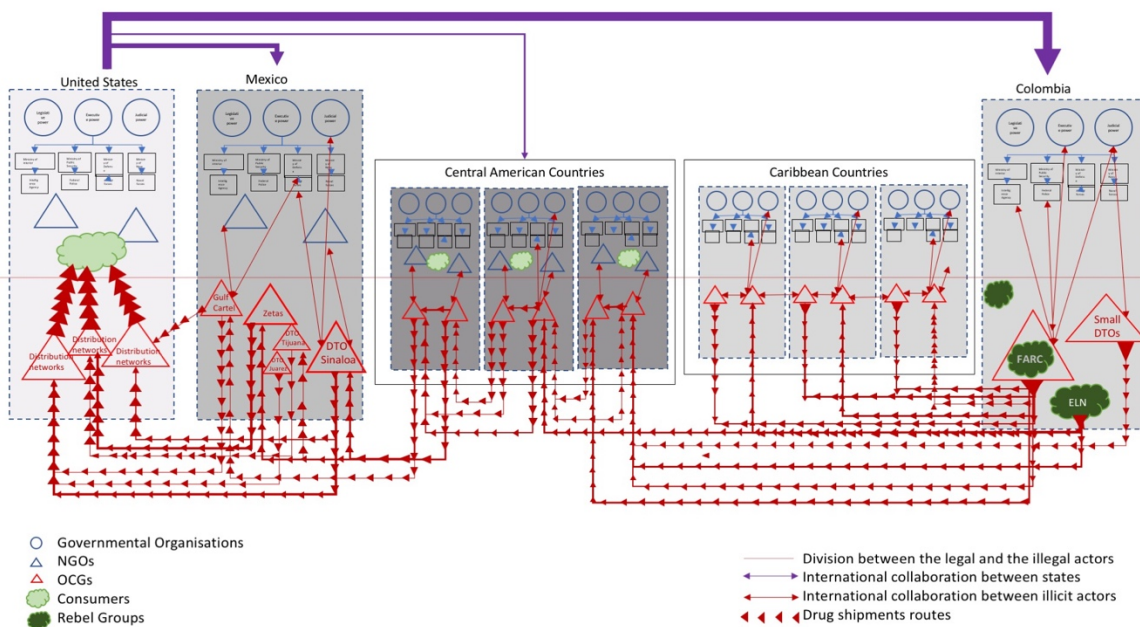
Drug Trafficking networks during the 1990s



Source: created by the author

Figure 16 Drug trafficking of cocaine to the U.S. during the 2000s

Drug Trafficking networks during the 2000s



Source: created by the author

At the same time, the international cooperation was stronger between the U.S. and Colombia to tackle the Medellin cartel than it was with Mexico. Due to the threat posed by

the actions of Pablo Escobar and the Medellin cartel, the Colombian government established bilateral cooperation tools and mechanisms with the U.S. government. At this point, cooperation was in the best interest of Colombia, due to the national instability caused by the cartels, and to the U.S. due to the boom on cocaine consumption coming from Colombia.

At this point, we can understand the U.S. actions from the International Liberalism perspective. The concern for the increasing number of the population afflicted by cocaine addiction in the U.S. lead the government to increase its cooperation with Colombia to tackle cocaine trafficking. In this regard, the international cooperation against drug trafficking became a trend between the U.S. and the countries in the region.

The U.S. recognized the threat posed by DTOs and implemented international cooperation policies to support foreign governments in their effort against the criminal organizations. This created an interdependence in the fight against drug trafficking, in which the U.S. aids the country through resources and capacity building mechanisms, aiming towards collective security. In terms of Mexico, both countries cooperate against the Mexican DTOs.

However, the principles of International Liberalism can also be applied to the behaviour of the DTOs. Instead of competing against each other, the Mexican and Colombian DTOs began cooperation to increase their trafficking capacities. Furthermore, Nye's (2007, p. 89) concept of collective security can be applied to the evolution of the cartels. At the international sphere, the Mexican DTOs had opted to cooperate with other DTOs. This first happen with their alliance with the Cali and the Medellin cartels. After the fall of the bi-cartel system in Colombia, the Mexican DTOs began to establish cooperation mechanisms for cocaine trafficking with the criminal groups in Central America.

As the Mexican DTOs increased their capacities, they were also more powerful than any of the actors in Central America. This asymmetry of power gave the Mexican DTOs an advantage compared to Central American traffickers. As it was explained in Chapter 3, the asymmetries of power can help create dependencies in which both actors win asymmetrically. In this situation, the Mexican Sinaloa and Gulf cartel got the mayor benefit from trafficking cocaine. However, this did not mean that the traffickers in Central America were losing; on the contrary, the larger the amount of cocaine being trafficked, the more revenues for all the actors involved.

What is more, as the Sinaloa and Gulf DTOs increased their international power, Mexico began to enter into a spiral of impunity because the cartels became empowered from the new revenue provided by the cocaine flow. The corruption networks between the main cartels in Mexico and the members of the governmental institutions is something that could be observed in the later years thanks to the investigations and indictments provided by the DEA. The corruption relations with the security institutions allowed the Sinaloa and Gulf cartels to build a constant flow of cocaine to the U.S. Hence as the cartels increased their power, elite members of the security institutions were also benefited by this.

By establishing strong relations with elite members of the security institutions, the cartels became a relevant actor in Mexico. Furthermore, this relation aided their power as actors at the international level. The conditions lived by the cartels at home, in terms of their evolution and trafficking skills, ensured the power of the cartels in the region. This power was used not only to create relations with other DTOs in the region, but it was also used to establish corruption networks with the legal institutions from Central American countries. The latest case of this international behaviour was presented through the case of the investigation against presidential candidate and his links to the Sinaloa cartel, mentioned in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 3, I presented the emphasis given by Keohane and Martin (2004, p.41-42) to the power that the self-serving interests of the governmental elites have in international cooperation. In other words, when we observe the State as an international actor, we can say that those who create governmental policies direct international cooperation. At this point, I bring back a quote by Keohane (1985, p.51-52), who states that in International Liberalism, “intergovernmental cooperation takes place when the policies actually followed by one government are regarded by its partners as facilitating realization of their own objectives, as the result of a process of policy coordination.” Keohane is recognizing the governmental institutions’ capacity to establish cooperation other foreign governmental institutions.

If we change the word government for actor, we can observe that cooperation between actors in different countries takes place when the policies or actions taken in one country facilitate the realization of the objectives of other actors. When we recognize the Mexican DTOs as actors in the international system, it is easy to understand that the willingness towards cooperation relies on the actor’s interests. At this point, the international cooperation established between the Sinaloa cartel with criminal groups and governmental personnel in Guatemala is related to the win-win situation provided by cocaine trafficking.

At the same time, asymmetric benefits allowed the Sinaloa and the Gulf cartel to establish cocaine routes in the Central American region. Both cartels had agreements with local DTOs in the Central American countries. The small Central American DTOs benefitted from the cocaine revenues paid by the Mexican DTOs. Furthermore, at the same time this cooperation gave the Sinaloa and the Gulf cartels more power inside Mexico, it also gave them an unseen international relevance. By dealing with the local DTOs and the political actors in some of the Central American countries, the Sinaloa and the Gulf cartel established themselves as the main actors in the cocaine trafficking in the Americas.

The parallel sequence of the events of each variable interacted to cause alterations in the cocaine trafficking routes from Colombia to the U.S., as well as in the DTOs involved. Even when the Mexican cartels positioned themselves as the main actors in the region, there was a constant appearance of much smaller trafficking organizations in Central America that sought to take part in the cocaine trafficking business. Figure 14, 15, and 16 present the evolution of the links of international cooperation between the cartels, according to the change in routes and actors. The first figure presents the trafficking scenario observed

during the 1980s, when the Colombian DTOs were using the Caribbean as main trafficking point for the Cocaine shipped to the U.S. In a similar way, Figure 15 and 16 present the trafficking routes and actors during the 1990s and the 2000s respectively.

The changes that can be observed is the emergence in the 1990s of the Central American countries in the cocaine routes, while the Caribbean routes were diminished. In parallel developments, the Mexican DTOs became the main traffickers of cocaine to the U.S. Furthermore, during the 2000s, the Mexican DTOs strengthened their power over the cocaine routes through Central America. These situations were possible thanks to the constant cocaine demand in the U.S., which has been an everlasting incentive for DTOs to adapt and prevail.

Figure 16 presents a multiplication of routes and drug shipments. The purpose of the increase in the number of routes is to represent the increase in the cocaine consumption observed in the U.S. during the 2000s, as it can be observed in the Table 4 presented earlier in this chapter. The increase in cocaine consumption serves as a major incentive to the DTOs to cooperate. When the demand increases, the actors that manage the supply –in this case the Mexican DTOs– will try to take advantage by increasing the supply. In turn, this meant further incentives to cooperate with the small DTOs in Central America.

#### **5.4 Conclusions**

The process of international expansion of Mexican DTOs in Latin America was linked to exogenous variables that indirectly affected the cartels. This chapter explained how different circumstances lived outside Mexico provided the cartels with better business opportunities. The end of the Caribbean routes and the Bi-Cartel system in Colombia, the pacification of Central America and the historical constancy of the US cocaine demand incentivized the Mexican DTOs to increase their illicit capacities and the scope of their organisations. Such observations are an example that exogenous events have the capacity to affect the development of Mexican DTOs in the long run.

The relation between all the variables and the regional empowerment of the DTO was explained by triangulating all the variables. What is more, I used the Puzzle approach to create visual representations of the multiple triangulations between the different variables. After explaining this development, I used International Liberalism to explain how the Mexican DTOs achieved a place in the International system becoming an actor that cooperates with other actors from different governmental institutions and from foreign criminal organizations.

The increase in the international cooperation relations between the Mexican cartels and their foreign counterparts was visually represented with Figures 14, 15 and 16 make it visible that the trafficking routes are not a constant line, but rather a complicated system of number of shipments and diversification of transshipment points. In other words, cocaine trafficking is not a constant unchanging flow, but a complicated system that uses all the countries in the region; when one part is affected, the actors in other part of the network emerge to fulfil its role as cocaine transshipment points. Furthermore, the power acquired by the Mexican cartels allows the maintenance of asymmetric cooperation and dependence

between all the trafficking actors from Colombia to the U.S. At this point, the logistic capacities of the Mexican DTOs favour the interests of all the actors in the region. In other words, cooperating with the Mexican DTOs for the trafficking of cocaine to the U.S. means a win-win situation for all the actors involved.

The exercise of explaining and analysing different variables was proved to be valuable to understand the intricate relations between the context and the units of analysis. The next chapter takes makes the same exercise of identifying and explaining variables, but it is applied to the case of Europe. This application makes it possible to observe similarities and divergences in the contexts of cocaine trafficking in both regions, and at the same time it serves as background knowledge for understanding the role that the Mexican cartels may have in Europe.



## **Chapter 6 The evolution of cocaine trafficking to Europe.**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The main objective of this thesis was to determinate whether or not the Mexican DTOs had expanded their influence on the cocaine trafficking routes to Europe or not. This question rose from official documents (EUROPOL, 2013 and DNA, 2016) that claimed that the Mexicans were expanding to Europe, consolidating themselves as key players in the Trans-Atlantic cocaine trafficking. The present chapter explores the evolution of the cocaine routes to Europe and the role that the Mexican cartels have played in it. The present chapter is divided into five parts.

The first part presents information about the demand for cocaine in Europe. The selection of this independent variable was made first on the observed relevance that the U.S. demand for cocaine has had in the evolution of the trafficking routes in the Americas. Second, it was based in the information gathered from my first interviewee, who explained to me the relevance of observing the demand of drugs to understand the changes in the supply. This part uses quantitative information that was collected from the statistics published by the European governments and by the EMCDDA. The intention of this part is to understand the historical moment in which Europe emerged as a main consumer of the drug. The acknowledgment of the timing is important because it can be placed into the context of what was happening in Latin America. As independent variables, the increase in demand and the increase in seizures alter the cocaine trafficking routes to Europe, as well as the DTOs that play a role in this business.

The second part explains the evolution of the cocaine supply chain to Europe, considering cocaine seizures and relevant counter narcotic strategies. In this part, I present empirical information collected from the interviews and questionnaires with the SMEs. During the interviews, I asked each SME to explain the evolution of the cocaine routes, to observe if any of the experts mentioned the relevance of the Mexican DTOs at any point. The assumption was that if the Mexican DTOs had become main players in the trans-Atlantic cocaine route, this would show naturally in the SME's answers. Hence, the value of this section is the integrated knowledge about the historic evolution of the routes, identifying their changes and the emergence of new actors such as the African and Brazilian DTOs. At this point, the sources about the emerging relevance of Brazil in the cocaine trafficking to Europe, came from official UN publications and academic research. At this point, this section presents a multiple triangulation analysis of the influence played by independent variables –the demand of cocaine in Europe, the increase in seizures and the effects of main counter-narcotic strategies– to have a better understanding of the phenomena of cocaine trafficking to Europe. I considered that it was important to make an analysis about the context of the evolution of the cocaine routes to Europe before presenting the empirical information about the degree of importance that the Mexican DTOs have in these routes. The reason for this is related to the fact that the cocaine routes to Europe have developed independently from the development of the Mexican DTOs. Hence, I considered that having a solid understanding of this evolution was important before proceeding to clarify the role of the Mexican DTOs.



The third section presents the information given by the SMEs about the Mexican expansion in the cocaine routes to Europe. After asking my interviewees about the routes to Europe, I quired them specifically about the involvement of Mexicans cartels. This section presents a direct answer to the research question that sought to determine if the Mexican DTOs were transnationalizing to Europe. The information provided by each SME was instructive and unique according to the experience of each interviewee. Furthermore, I observed that all the interviews, through different answers and, came to the same conclusions.

The fourth section presents the documents and official Italian publications that claimed the increasing role that the Mexicans had in Europe. It contrasts the official information with the answers given by the SMEs during the interviews and explains the possible origin for the perception of Mexican DTOs involvement in the drug trade in Europe presented by the Italian authorities. The data for this part was sourced from official documents published by the security agencies in the Italian government and from specific questions made to the SMEs based on the content of the Italian reports. The purpose of this part is to verify whether the information presented by the Italian documents is accurate or whether it is a perception. In this part, the explanations given by the SMEs aided to determine the lack of involvement that the Mexican DTOs have in the cocaine trafficking to Europe.

The fifth section presents the analysis made by triangulating all the variables and the information presented in this chapter. At this point, the objective was to triangulate the information gathered in the different sections and observe the similitudes and divergencies about the main players in the cocaine routes. This analysis included the use of the visualization of multiple triangulation through the puzzle approach to explain the changing routes to Europe, as a way of understanding the actors involved in the cocaine routes to Europe as well as the different historic changes of the routes. Moreover, in this section I integrated an analytic consideration for the parallel sequence of events that the Mexican DTOs were living in Mexico and the Americas that were explained in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. This generated a more comprehensive analysis of the role that the Mexican cartels play in the transatlantic cocaine routes, based on the influence played by the independent variables in Mexico and Latin America.

In summary, this chapter presents the main empirical information gathered to answer the research question. In some parts, the information was complemented by official reports and academic publications. The use of these sources had the objective of increasing the understanding of events and situations that were mentioned by the SMEs. What is more, the last section creates an analysis that triangulates the sequence of events and critical junctures lived by the Sinaloa, the Gulf and the Zetas cartel in Mexico, in Latin America and in the context of the cocaine routes to Europe.

## **6.2 European regional circumstances during the 1990s and 2000s.**

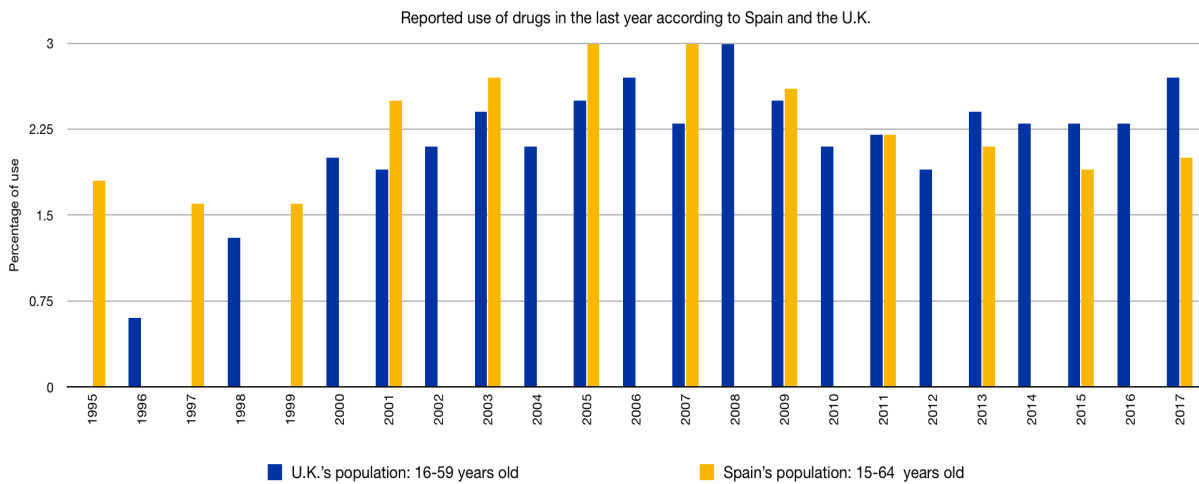
### **6.3 The increase of cocaine demand in Europe**

The circumstantial factors presented in Chapter 5 analysed how the transnational expansion of cocaine routes was affected by several different non-related events in time. The last factor discussed was the role that the U.S. demand of cocaine has had as an incentive for the creating new supply chains. In regard to the European drug market development, SME 1 explained that trafficking follows “the behaviour of consumers.” In this regard, SME 1 (*pers.comm.*) 9 November 2016) made notice of the switch in the consumption between heroin and cocaine by the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. She stated that “heroin was much more the drug of the 60s and the 70s, and cocaine started to be the drug of the 80s when there was this illusion that was making you perform more and be more active”.

The demand for cocaine kept growing through the decades. Hence, the availability of a large market willing to pay for the drug is a determinant for the supply to adapt and evolve. As Europe became the second largest cocaine market in the world (UNODC, 2010, p.81), the cocaine DTOs observed a large economic incentive to increase their trafficking business in the continent. However, until the last decade, European authorities had little knowledge about the cocaine supply and demand. The EMCDDA 2001 report on its section on cocaine addiction announced that between 1994 and 1999 there was a considerable increase in the number of addicts seeking treatment. At the same time, the report declares that there is a lack of research about cocaine addicts (EMCDDA, 2001, p.35). The relevance of this gap is that the lack of knowledge reflects that until the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, cocaine was not considered a priority for governments in terms of addicts and drug abuse.

What is more, the consumption in European countries was different than in the U.S. While the cocaine boom in the U.S. began before the 1990s, cocaine addiction in Europe showed an important increase in the 2000s. Among all the countries, Spain and the U.K. became the largest consumers of cocaine in Europe. Figure 17 presents the information of cocaine consumption in Spain and the U.K. as the largest consumers of cocaine in Europe. From mid 1990s until 2008 these countries observed an increase in the cocaine consumption. The rising demand was relevant for the DTOs because it represented the need to enlarge the supply. In other words, the more consumers there are, the more incentives for trafficking the drug.

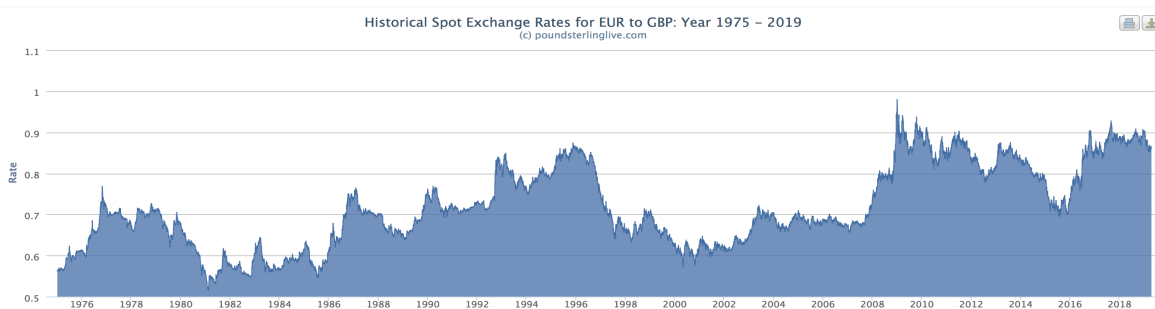
Figure 17 Drug consumption in Spain and the U.K.



Source: created by the author using information from Home Office, 2018; and the EMCDDA, 2018.

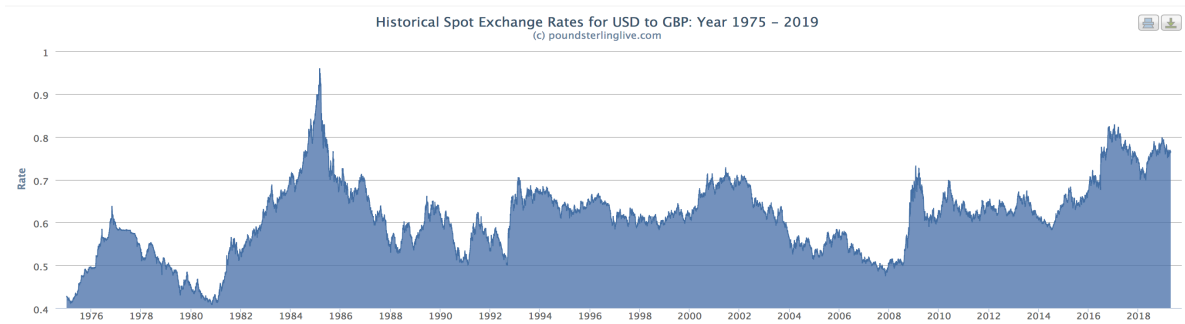
What is more, the relevance of the U.K. in the cocaine market is that the drug is paid in British pounds, which is one of the strongest currencies in the world; this strength can be observed in Figure 18 and 19. This was particularly important for the period of 1998 to 2008 for two reasons. On the one hand, the value of the Pound was more than 30 percent higher than the Dollar and the Euro during that period of time, which would have meant better revenues for cocaine traffickers in the U.K. illicit markets. On the other hand, the cocaine consumption in the U.K. increased between that period, reaching a historical high in 2008. In other words, combined, the value of the Pound and the increase in the consumption of cocaine were good incentives for DTOs to increase the illicit networks for supplying the U.K. cocaine market.

Figure 18 Historical exchange rates EUR-GBP



Source: retrieved from PoundSterlingLive, 2019a.

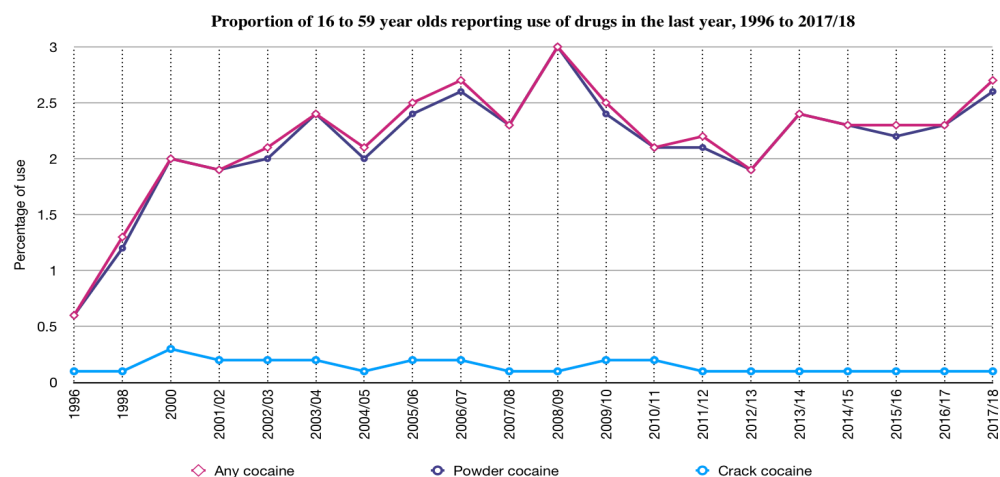
Figure 19 Historical exchange rates USD-GBP



Source: retrieved from PoundSterlingLive. 2019b.

Apart from the U.K., the increase of cocaine in Europe became a great source of revenue for the DTOs over time. As it can be observed in Figure 20, the consumption of cocaine spiked. By 2007, at least 4.5 million Europeans had used cocaine in the last year (EMCDDA, 2007, p.14), compared to 2014, when the average of use was 3.6 million Europeans (EMCDDA, 2016, p.100). Although the EMCDDA (2016) clarifies that the statistics of use in the past year do not mean a frequent consumption of all users, the estimates of the retail market in Europe was of at least 5 billion euros per year.

Figure 20 Cocaine consumption in the U.K.



Source: created by the author using information from Home Office, 2018.

This large European market was, and still is, one of the main incentives for the criminal profit-oriented organisations. An example was explained by SME 1, due to the fact that the drug consumer and drug producer countries are in generally in different geographical locations, criminal organisations create alliances to mutually benefit each other. (SME 1 (*pers.comm.*) 9 November 2016). For this reason, the existence of drug consumption in some countries is providing large incentives to criminal organisations to evolve and adapt to their circumstances.

#### 6.4 The evolution of the cocaine supply chain to Europe.

The increase in cocaine consumption in Europe opened opportunities for DTOs across the world, however it also meant some challenges. Moving cocaine from the Andean

Region to the U.S. is relatively easy because it can be done over land, crossing different countries that share similar cultures and the same language (Spanish). In the case of Europe, the first big challenge is geography. Small airplanes or vessels cannot cross the Atlantic Ocean and reach Europe, so there is a need for better transport logistics. Once in Europe, the DTOs face cultural and language barriers, because the only country in which Spanish is a major language is Spain.

The language and the geographic position of Spain were very attractive for South American traffickers. As stated in an interview with a Colombian drug trafficker made by Cavalhiero (2008), the cocaine traffickers were people with no schooling, that did not speak other languages except Spanish. Furthermore, Spain had a festive culture where using drugs was normal. The festive culture, the liberties and the Spanish language were the main reasons that Latin American drug traffickers were attracted to Spain.

At this point in history, the dominant Latin American illicit actor were the Colombian cartels. SME 27(*pers.comm.*) 27 August 2019) stresses that: “In the 1980’s the flow of cocaine to Europe was in relatively small quantities. Trafficking organisations used couriers, in suitcases, in quantities of 25 to 200 kgs hidden in containers and cargo. Larger consignments were rare. As consumption and demand grew, and as the criminal organisations became more powerful, larger consignments were sent.” As it was explained in chapter 5, during the 1980s the Colombian Cali and Medellin cartels were at the peak of their power. At the same time, the Mexican Gulf cartel was in the process of becoming a relevant partner of the Colombian DTOs in the cocaine routes to the U.S. However, the Mexicans were not mentioned as having any relevant role in the cocaine routes to Europe.

Furthermore, during the 1970s and 1980s, the European DTOs were dealing with a more relevant issue: the policies against the heroin routes through France. At this point, the counter narcotic policies of the time became really relevant for the role that the Calabrian ‘Ndrangheta mafia achieved through time in cocaine trafficking. In this way, the international fight against heroin trafficking was also shaping the interest of European DTOs in cocaine trafficking. According to SME 3, during the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, when the Marseille heroin trafficking route was dismantled and the Italian authorities cracked down on heroin refineries in Sicilia, “the members from the ‘Ndrangheta got in touch with the Sicilian families in charge of heroin traffic” (SME 3 (*pers.comm.*) 26 November 2016). This cooperation had the goal of establishing new drug trafficking routes, and moreover it shows that criminal organisations cooperate to enlarge their illicit activities.

At this point, the Calabrian mafia had an advantage in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. According to SME 3, the ‘Ndrangheta was the smartest group in Europe because during the 1970s, the group decided not to compete with the Cosa Nostra who was trafficking heroin, and they became pioneers in trafficking cocaine instead. They established relationships with the Medellin and Cali cartels in Colombia, and trafficked it to Australia, a country with an important Calabrian community. (SME 3 (*pers.comm.*) 26 November 2016). This decision could be observed as a critical juncture for the Calabrian mafia. This decision created a path dependency that lead this organization to become one the largest

cocaine traffickers in Europe. However, at this point in history and until the end of the 1990s, Europe was still a small consumer of cocaine.

In this regard, SME 27(*pers.comm.*) 27 August 2019) states that “by the late 1990’s smaller criminal groups still imported drugs in smaller quantities, but the Cali Cartel and North Valley Cartels were so powerful that they preferred to ship larger consignments. Hence, they started to send multi-tonne loads on “motherships”, large cargo ships that were purchased by the cartel specifically for drug-runs. They also used yachts (often to send 400 to 800kgs), fishing boats and other “uncanalised” vessels to transport large single loads, often involving several tonnes at a time. The bulk loads of cocaine were shipped primarily to Spain, where it was stashed and distributed to other European countries. Colombian organisations were responsible for the supply and transportation to Europe. The cartels had extensive Colombian staff and organisations in Europe who coordinated onward distribution in smaller quantities. The Colombians also forged commercial alliances with Galician transport organisations in Spain who often coordinated the receipt of drugs at sea, and then storage in Northern Spain. After Spain, Belgium and Netherlands were the main gateways to Europe. This was because the ports of Antwerp and Rotterdam had such poor controls, so the Colombians could get their drugs through with very little risk compared to other ports.”

At the same time, by the end of the 1990s the Italian authorities started witnessing the increased importance that the Calabrian groups had gained in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. SME 3 described one of the first discoveries of the Calabrian expansion in Latin America. He got a tip off from a Calabrian woman that was constantly arriving in Venezuela from different places such as Italy, Colombia, Ecuador, Suriname, and Miami. She was allegedly trying to collect money from all over the world for a nuclear submarine. Gen. Scala recounts that after verifying the information, he convinced a General in the National Guard to create a team to investigate the case for the next three years which led to an international operation known as operation Orinoco 2000 against the cocaine trafficking.

In the words of the SME 3:

“we got strong information that she had collected around 25 million dollars from different countries, of course Italy, Albania, and, Germany, Holland, Spain, Belgium, France, Portugal, Russia, Poland. On the other side, Australia, India, Thailand, Nigeria in Africa, Senegal, so all over the world. Then the Colombians started to arrive in Caracas...

...We discovered that the route went from Colombia through light aircrafts, full of drugs that landed in Venezuelan territory close to the Orinoco, fuelled up and flew to the sea to throw drug packages of 50 kg each. From the jungle emerged a number of boats that would retrieve the packages from the sea at any time of the day or the night, and stocked it in the jungle...

...We got a tip that the Colombians were coming to pay the workers from Suriname and Guyana because they did the dirty work... Then we have the news that five Blues [general cargo vessels] were ready to load 5 tons each. The vessels parked in

the shore of the Orinoco, and the workers did the inverse labour, they took the drugs and load then on the boats and take them to the vessels. The English authorities provided technological devices... .. and those were put on the vessels so we could trace their location. From the information we have, two had to take the drugs to the U.S. One to Rotterdam in Holland, one to Germany and one to Greece.” ((*pers.comm.*) 26 November 2016).

In continuation to the anecdote, SME 3 shared that when they were still in Venezuela, his team planned an operation to wait for the Colombian traffickers who would arrive in some days. The operation was supposed to last seven days and the supplies were prepared accordingly. However, the Colombians took 6 months to arrive and SME 3 and his team stayed on the ground the whole time, waiting. They were unable to use helicopters for getting supplies or carry out surveillance, so they ate whatever they could find in the jungle and used tactics from indigenous people to observe the workers until the Colombians arrived.

In the meantime, the authorities were following the vessels and carried out operations in different places including Greece, Albania, the Canary Islands and Cuba, seizing over 41 tons of cocaine with an average purity of 98%. The international operation ended in the arrest of 442 suspects in different parts of the world, including public servants like the General Prosecutor of Albania and Chief of the Greek police. In Italy, the operation dismantled an entire Calabrian group that oversaw the financial methods. (SME 3 (*pers.comm.*) 26 November 2016)

Even when SME3 clarified that there was no participation of the Mexican cartels, operation Orinoco 2000 provided evidence about how the cocaine routes to Europe were operating. In contrast to the cocaine routes from Colombia to the United states, where the Mexican DTOs had agreements with the Colombian DTOs, the route to Europe was not a simple agreement between the ‘Ndrangheta and the Colombian cartels. It was a very complex system that included the collaboration of parties from all over the world, with the Colombians on the supply end, and the Calabrian groups having a role in the financial affairs. Furthermore, it also demonstrates the increased resources that the security community needs to have to fight DTOs, in terms of people, technological equipment and international coordination.

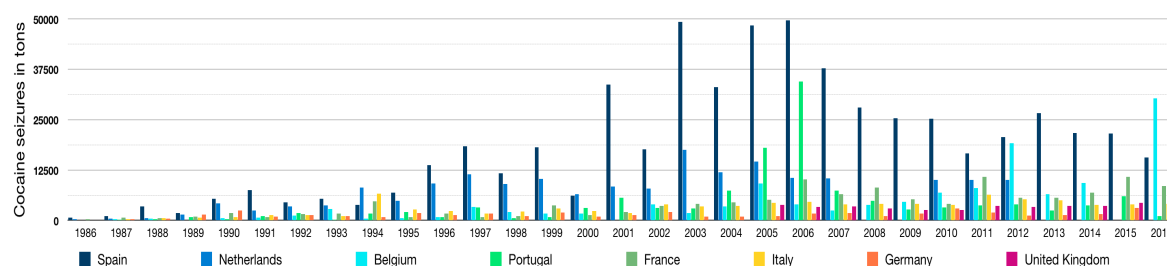
The findings from Operation Orinoco 2000 are one example of how the routes were shifting during the 1990s. Chapter 5 analysed how the counter narcotic efforts in the Andean Region and the end of the bi-cartel system influenced the emerging role of the Mexican DTOs. However, the change in Colombia’s illegal world also influenced the role of the ‘Ndrangheta mafia from Calabria, Italy. SME 16 explained that after the increase of tension in the Andean region, the drug traffickers adapted and began using Brazil as a transshipment point, “the Santos Port of Brazil, is now one of the ports that the Ndrangheta is using to ship cocaine into Europe” (SME 16 (*pers.comm.*) 26 Jun 2018). Considering the drug trafficking logistics discovered in Venezuela during Operation Orinoco expressed by SME 3((*pers.comm.*) 26 November 2016), it can be assumed that the new route included the

collaboration of the Brazilian criminal groups, which meant a coordination strategy between Colombian producers, the Brazilians and the Calabrian ‘Ndrangheta in Italy.

### 6.5 The counter cocaine efforts in Europe

Another independent variable was the “awakening” of European countries to the threat posed by cocaine trafficking. The emerging routes to Europe began to be an issue of concern at the beginning of the 20th century, when the seizures began to spike. As it can be observed in Figure 21, the seizures in Spain were constantly growing between 1995 and 1997; the registries decrease one year to be back to high levels in 1999. Seizures spiked in 2001 and 2003, transforming the country as the European door for cocaine. To counter the increase, in 2000 the Spanish government published its National Strategy about Drugs (PND, 2000). This document established a base for improving the efforts to tackle the trafficking of cocaine, including increasing international cooperation, the creation of a task force and the use of the available technology.

Figure 21 Evolution of cocaine interdiction in the eight countries with more seizures overtime



Source: created by the Author with information from EMCDDA, 2018.

A similar increase was observed in the Netherlands. Between 1999 and 2004 the country registered the second highest seizures after Spain, as it is shown in Figure 21. This increase was answered by further counter narcotic strategies. The best example is the “100% control policy” implemented at Schiphol airport in Amsterdam, where the authorities began checking all the passengers arriving from South America (EMCDDA, 2008, p. 18). This strategy ensured the disruption of one route through the airport but did little to reduce the entrance of cocaine to Europe, as it wasn’t a holistic approach to disrupting the trafficking routes of the DTO’s.

The strategies implemented in Spain and the Netherlands were accompanied by other countries in Europe, who became aware that the cocaine was coming mainly from South America. The counter-narcotic strategies seemed to work in these two countries; as it can be seen from 2007 onwards the Spanish seizures dropped, and a similar thing happened in the Netherlands. However just as in the Americas, the traffickers adapted to the new strategies and the supply did not stop, it only changed.

Additionally, Figure 21 shows how Portugal observed an unprecedented increase in seizures between 2004 and 2006. France and Belgium registered an increase of seizures during the same years, while the rest of the countries in Europe observed a rise of seizures. This represented the new interest from drug traffickers to diversify their drug routes. This



diversification relates to the fact that increasing the number of ports of entry for cocaine maximizes the possibility of its entrance into the continent.

The alarming number of seizures during the 2000s was a big incentive for the countries in Europe to seek further counter narcotic cooperation. In 2007, Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, Holland, Great Britain and Ireland created the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre – Narcotics. This intelligence fusion centre had the objective of tackling the cocaine flow that came via the Atlantic Ocean. (DCSA, 2007; 22-23). These additional efforts were the probable reason for the decrease in the seizures after 2007. However, this did not stop the flow of drugs.

### **The role of Africa in the cocaine flow to Europe.**

During the 2000s, the countries in Europe were aware of the cocaine coming from South America and implemented counter narcotic strategies. As a reaction to this, in 2004 the Latin American traffickers diversified their routes, adopting West Africa as a transshipment point (UNODC, 2011, p. 6) In this aspect, SME 27 (*pers.comm.*) 27 August 2019) elucidates that

“In 2004 and 2005, European law enforcement agencies (in particular UK working in partnership with Spain, Portugal and the USA) were able to seize record-breaking quantities of cocaine being transported by sea. 2005 and 2006 were the highest seizure levels on record. This put huge pressure on the Colombian suppliers, who looked for alternative routes and started to open up business in West Africa. Colombian criminal representatives were sent to Africa to establish networks, and they developed the route through Guinea Bissau, as well as Cape Verde.”

In this regard, SME 19 explained that the criminal organizations are using West Africa as transshipping point for the cocaine going to Europe. According to his experience, “There is evidence that that cocaine, we do know that there is a stable route of cocaine from the Andean region to Europe with transshipping points in West Africa. According to him “there is a route of coca-paste and cocaine out of Peru, through Bolivia, it goes into Paraguay, Brazil, and sometimes Argentina. And from there, it is either shipped directly to Europe, or in many cases to the West Coast of Africa for subsequent movement to Europe.” (*pers.comm.*) 21 August 2018).

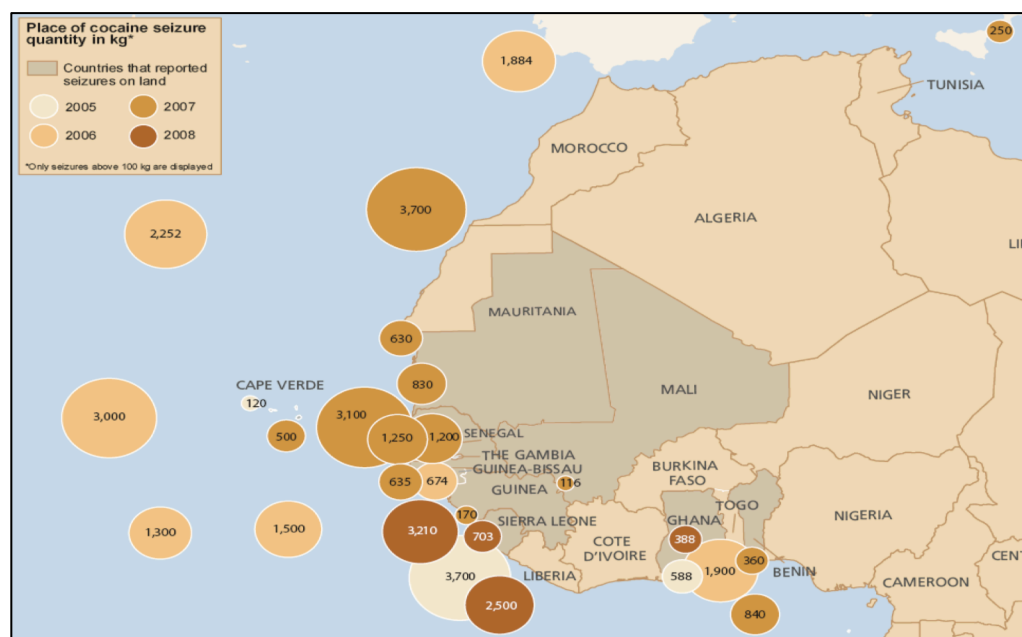
The new move to Africa implied that the DTOs began to build a trafficking network to support a constant flow of cocaine. This situation included the establishment of a corruption network. “In a few years, they had managed to undermine security and sow high-level corruption in a number of West African states” (UNODC, 2011, p. 6). This problem is emphasized by SME 14 from Ghana (SME 14 (*pers.comm.*) 24 April 2018) who points out that the corruption and lack of capacity, capabilities and information sharing became a problem at the moment of fighting drug trafficking in West Africa. The situation mentioned by SME 14 is fundamental because, just as in the case of Mexico, corruption and impunity can jeopardize the rule of law and empower crime.

Furthermore, the inclusion of Africa as a transshipment point was not random. SME 20 states that “Africa is located between the Latin America and Europe and the Barons in Latin America use the African drug couriers/dealers as middle men and sometime petty drug dealers from Africa and bring in drugs from South America to Africa before taking them to final destination of Europe and America in piecemeal. (Using African countries as a warehouse)” (SME 21 (*pers.comm.*) 5 Dec 2018). The traffickers took advantage of the geographical factor to keep their business going.

The use of Africa can be considered a strategic solution implemented by the DTOs. In the words of SME 26 “A larger chunk of cocaine trafficked into West Africa from Latin America is ultimately destined for the European market. It is a diversionary strategy because cargo and passengers from cocaine producing countries are put in the spotlight and scrutinised. The same cannot be said for those from West Africa” ((*pers.comm.*) 5 June 2019). In other words, by using Africa as transshipment point to Europe, traffickers are trying to evade counter narcotic policies against shipments coming directly from the Americas.

The problem is not new; SME 14 declared that “The boom [of cocaine trafficking] was from the early 90s. In the early 2000s, they would put the cocaine afloat with a GPS so someone would pick them up. The coordinators are people from Venezuela, Guyana, and Colombia” (SME 14 (*pers.comm.*) 24 April 2018). This situation is graphically presented with Figure 22. If we contrast this boom with seizures of cocaine presented in Figure 21 with the boom in West Africa, we can see a parallel situation. The European seizures increased since the beginning of the 2000s, and by the end of the decade the West African countries were perceiving the increase of these countries as transshipment points. For Europe, this meant that while they were controlling the access of South Americans, it was easier for the African OCGs to traffic the drugs, and the West African region emerged as a transshipment point.

Figure 22 Individual seizures linked to cocaine trafficking in Africa, 2005-2008



Source: retrieved from UNODCb, 2008.

In terms of the *modus operandi*, the cocaine is mainly shipped via maritime vessels. SME 26 explained that “Whilst shipments through seaports are common, human mules who have ingested cocaine capsules are being arrested on a daily basis” ((*pers.comm.*) 5 June 2019). While it is transhipped through Africa, the cocaine “is stock-piled especially in West Africa before being transported to Europe by different means like air cargoes, couriers and sometimes containerized.” (SME 22 (*pers.comm.*) 29 November 2018). SME 14 suggests that cocaine is trafficked via air cargo and boats to Europe, with the UK as a special destination.

This makes sense since the UK is the largest consumer in Europe. In regard to the flow of cocaine to the UK, SME 27 ((*pers.comm.*) 27 August 2019) makes a detailed explanation of the trafficking of the drug:

“In the 1980s and 1990s, traffickers in Peru and Bolivia used to send cocaine directly to the UK. From Bolivia, for example, major trafficker Roberto Suarez, was sending regular consignments of cocaine to Scotland and Northern England. Similarly, one of Peru’s most important traffickers in the 1980’s was arrested in London when a shipment of coffee beans arrived from Peru with 100 kgs cocaine inside. By the early 1990’s, the Colombian cartels took over most of the business. Peru and Bolivia still produced cocaine, but the bulk of shipments were coordinated by Colombian cartels.

Bolivian cocaine was exported via Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina, and also the Chilean port of Arica and Valparaiso. The Peruvian main port was Callao. Colombian cocaine was exported to Europe primarily from the Colombian ports of Cartagena, Santa Marta, Turbo and Buenaventura (for containers) but also from the coal ports.

Large “motherships” were loaded with multi-tonne loads of cocaine by speedboats, as the ships passed by the northern coast of Colombia en-route to Europe. Later, as the Colombian and international authorities got better at stopping them, they started doing the on-loading from other countries, such as Ecuador, Venezuela, Surinam and Guyana.”

The drug routes are in constant change and that is why it is so difficult to reduce the overall supply. SME 26 ((*pers.comm.*) 5 June 2019) gave an example of the dynamicity of the illicit trafficking network:

“In the early 1990s to year 2000, drug trafficking in West Africa was controlled by Nigerian Syndicates. These syndicates recruited couriers across West Africa to travel to Latin America and came back with cocaine using various ingenious concealment methods. These were repackaged and couriered to Europe all under the control of these syndicates. However, from 2004, large cocaine seizures indicated that other nationals have formed syndicates to ply the drug trade.”

In relation to this, SME 20 ((*pers.comm.*) 4 December 2018) observed that “to a large extent the Nigerian Drug Trafficking Organisations (DTOs) control the all the traffic

of cocaine through Africa to Europe. They recruit all couriers of African descent and even other nationals from Latin America to traffic cocaine to Europe.” Although the Nigerians are not a DTO as expressed by SME 21((*pers.comm.*) 5 December 2018), they are involved in “almost all the organised crime in Africa,” including activities like “child trafficking, cigarette smuggling, money laundering”.

Another statement is given by SME 22 ((*pers.comm.*) 29 November 2018) who explained that “Cocaine trafficking in Nigeria and West Africa is coordinated and spear-headed by the South Americans, especially the Colombians and the Mexicans. They recruit the Africans as partners in the trade and ship the drugs to the Africans while they monitor how it is sold and get their money back.” At this point, SME 22 did not elaborate on the participation that the Mexican DTOs had in West Africa and Nigeria. No other SME talked about the Mexicans as having a relevant role in the trafficking of cocaine to Africa.

Similarly, SME 26 ((*pers. Com*) 5 June 2019) stated that “There have been allusions of links to Mexican Cartels in many cases of huge drug seizures in West Africa, but investigations did not confirm any named cartels.” Similarly, SME 14 ((*pers.comm.*) 24 April 2018) expressed that had never come across Mexicans in any case; it was the Colombians, Venezuelans and Brazilians who were involved. “Ghanaians and Nigerians will go to Brazil, Sao Paolo, and most of the airline they use Ethiopian Airline and Air Morocco. They will have small amounts but weakly. Colombians and Venezuelans come to Ghana in the containers with the drug with more kg but not as frequent as Brazilians.” At this point, SME 14 emphasized the role the DTOs in Brazil are playing in the transshipments of cocaine to West Africa observing that it is common to find Brazilians that had partnerships in West Africa for the cocaine trafficking.

The only mention referring the role of the Mexicans was related to methamphetamine. SME 20 ((*pers.comm.*) 4 December 2018) and SME 21 ((*pers.comm.*) 5 December 2018) confirmed that Mexicans are more involved with the production and trafficking of methamphetamine in Africa. In this case, SME 20 mentioned that “Nigeria, in 2016, recorded a case involving four Mexicans operating clandestine methamphetamine mega labs in conjunction with Nigerian Organised criminal groups.” However, none confirmed having observed or known about any cases related to cocaine trafficking by the Mexican cartels. Furthermore, no other SME drew attention to the role of the Mexican DTOs in the methamphetamine trafficking in Africa.

What was interesting about the role of Africa in the transshipment of cocaine was that nowadays, the routes had kept transnationalizing. SME 14 (2018) reveals that “now they [the traffickers] are going against the traditional routes... This case we are still working on it... they are now using courier services to take drugs from central America to Florida and then to West Africa concealed in different items and merchandize. Like fridges stuffed, and then they change to other “containers.” At this point, it is relevant to clarify that SME 14 did not mean that the Mexican DTOs are trafficking drugs to Florida, but that there is an increase in the Caribbean route where many Caribbean players intervene.

Similarly, SME 27 ((*pers.comm.*) 27 August 2019) ensured that “There is no single group or nationality controlling the flow. Criminal groups in Colombia (mainly Colombian

nationals) work with criminal groups in Spain, Netherlands, UK, Italy, Albania and others, to coordinate shipments. There is no single nationality at the top of the pyramid.” We can conclude at this point, that in the cocaine trafficking to Europe there is not one main actor. The illicit network adds as many actors as needed and adapts to the circumstances ensuring the continuation of the cocaine flow. Under this understanding, the emergence of new points of transshipment is an effect derived from counter narcotic operations.

### **The emerging role of Brazil as a transshipment point**

In terms of the evolution of cocaine trafficking the relevance of Africa was, and still is, that it allows a great diversification of the trafficking routes. As it was mentioned by SME 14 ((*pers.comm.*) 24 April 2018), Brazilians have agreements with DTOs in Africa for cocaine trafficking. In a similar way, SME 19 ((*pers.comm.*) 21 August 2018) and SME 20 ((*pers.comm.*) 4 December 2018) explained that the cocaine shipped to Europe via Africa uses Brazil as the exit point in Latin America. The coast of Western Africa is closer to Brazil than any other part in South America. The emergent role of Brazil in the transshipment of cocaine gained the attention of the public only by the end of the 2000s. This did not mean that it was not happening before; it just means that it was the point in which Brazil became “important” when talking about cocaine trafficking.

This situation was observed by Brune (2011, para.4), who explained the increase of Brazil as a point of transshipment. The seizures in Brazil increased ten times between 2005 and 2009. “from 25 tons in 2005 to 260 tons in 2009.” Only 15 percent of South America’s cocaine destined for the U.S. and Europe travels through Brazil, but the link with West Africa suggests the volume of drugs entering Brazil is likely to grow.” In other words, the end of the decade was the point in which Brazil as transshipment point became an issue too big to be ignored.

Just as it happened with the direct route to Europe, it was until it became a big problem that the governments affected took action. The Brazilian government start realizing the complexity of the problem that cocaine trafficking had generated inside Brazil through the availability of crack cocaine (Bastos et al. 2011, p.1191). Brombacher and Maihold (2009, pp. 12-13) explain that it was until this point of history that Brazil began to implement mechanisms to improve cooperation with the West African countries to tackle the cocaine routes. However, the increase in cooperation was a reactive behaviour from Brazil.

The role of Brazil in the transshipment of cocaine continue to grow during the 2010s. According to the UNODC (2018a, p. 33) between 2012 and 2016 Brazil was noted as one of the main points of departures for the cocaine seized in West Africa. Islas (2019c, p. 54) draws attention to the role of Brazil as the main transshipment point for cocaine to Africa; and as an emerging market for the commercialization of the drug. The emerging demand as well as the strengthening of Brazil as transshipment point are giving strength to DTOs while complicating law enforcement. The greater profits gained from cocaine passing through Brazil, the larger the corruptive resources for the criminal world.

## Multiple triangulation analysis

The present section analyses the different exogenous independent variables by triangulating them to observe how one affects the others. The first consideration is the role that demand has for the DTOs. It was explained that the demand has not only been growing, but it had also diversified. More countries are showing an increase in the cocaine consumption trends. This is beneficial for the illicit actors because it means a bigger and more diverse market to sell their products. Hence, the more diversified the demand, the more space there is for traffickers to interact. In other words, the market and the supply chain are too big to be monopolised by one group. At this point, the demand for cocaine can be seen as the main independent variable that shaped the evolution of the drug supply to Europe. Just as the adaptation of the cocaine routes in the Americas, when the demand for cocaine is inelastic, the supply will find its way. Furthermore, just as it happened in the Americas with the routes to the U.S., when the cocaine demand is inelastic the implementation of counternarcotic policies will lead to the diversification of supply routes.

In the case of Europe, the supply chain found its way through the diversification of actors and routes. Hence, the rise of West Africa and Brazil as transshipment points. This process can be observed as a path dependent on the sequence of counternarcotic strategies and the subsequent diversification of routes. The trend at the international level is that the countries increase collaboration against drug trafficking while the DTOs diversify the routes, making it inclusive of other DTOs' participation. This trend can be observed when Spain became the strong port of entry for cocaine and the country implemented counternarcotic policies against cocaine trafficking. Furthermore, the countries in the region started increasing their collaboration at the international level with the intelligence fusion center. The subsequent effect of those policies was that the DTOs started using other routes, such as mules in the flights to the Netherlands. As the different European countries paid more attention to routes coming from south America, the DTOs diversified to use Africa and Brazil transshipment points.

At this point, there is an exogenous variable that remains constant in the international cocaine routes, and it is the relevance of Colombia. The importance of the Colombians in the illicit scenario of Europe is related to their control over the production of cocaine and the logistics needed for its trafficking<sup>6</sup>. The consolidated role of the Colombians as the producers attracted all other organisations who wanted to smuggle the drug, including the Italian mafia. The long-lasting role of Colombia in the cocaine supply chain, as well as the evolution of the routes can be observed in Figure 23 and Figure 24. This role is based on Colombia's capacity and efficiency to grow coca bushes which ensures its role as the main producer of cocaine in the world.

At the same time, Figures 29 and 30 have the objective of being graphic representations of the different stages of cocaine trafficking to Europe. It can be observed that the countries in West Africa were not as relevant during the 1990s as they became later

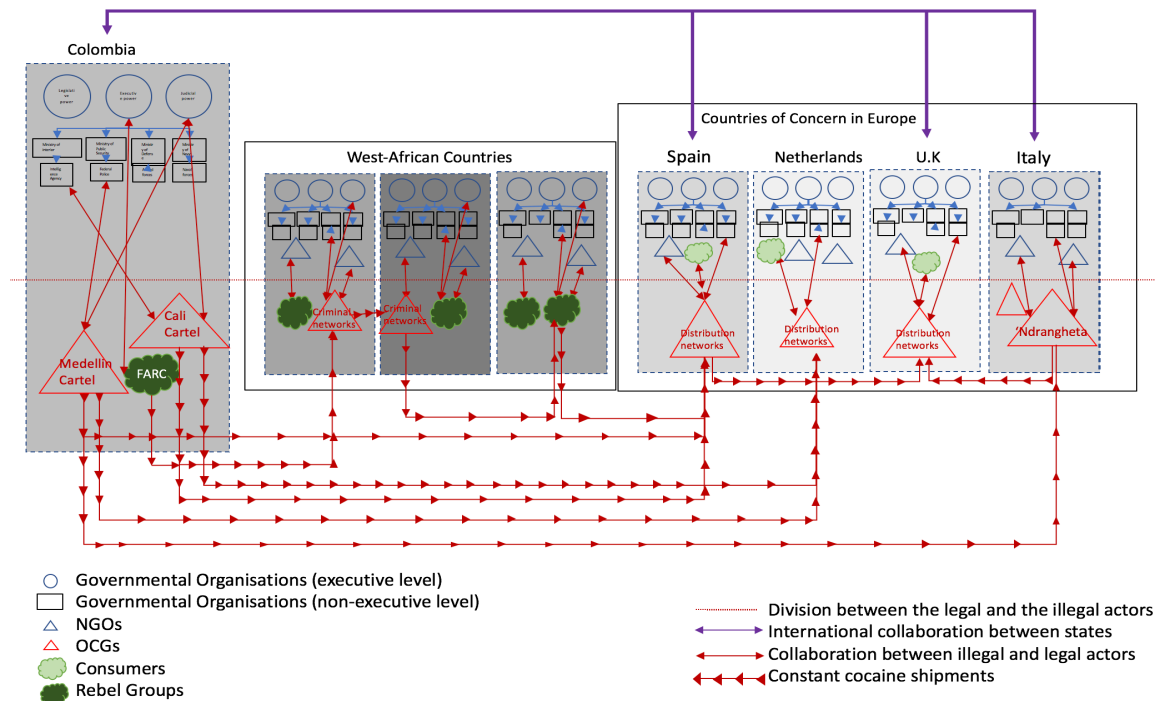
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<sup>6</sup> It takes around 400 kilograms of coca leaves to produce 2 kilograms of coca paste, or 1 kilogram of pure cocaine. Talking about a transnational business where the supply is weighed in tons, it is easier to conceal a small package of one kilogram of cocaine than 400 kilograms of leaves.

by the end of the 2000s. As it was said earlier, the rise of West African countries was a reaction to the increased counternarcotic efforts of the European countries. In other words, as counter narcotic policies forced diversification of routes and the consumption increased during the 2000s, the trafficking routes added the countries of West Africa to the transshipment points. What is more, by the end of the 2000s, the traffickers consolidated a new route leaving South America via Brazil and transshipping drugs to West Africa, as it can be observed in Figure 24.

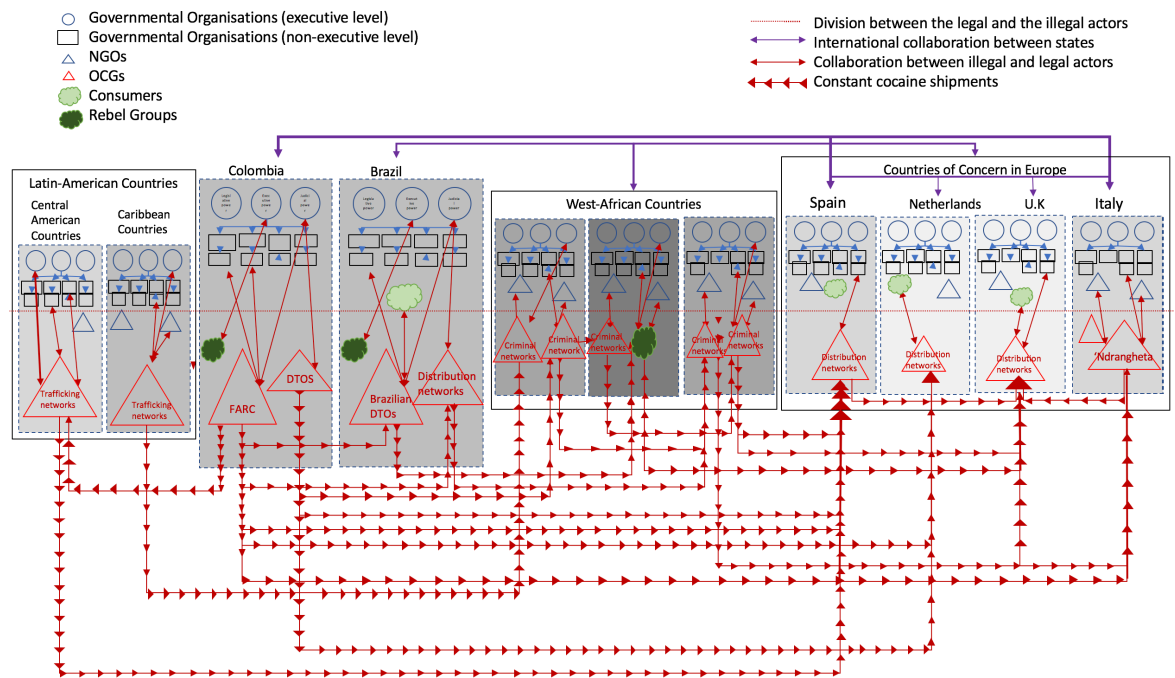
The size of Brazil in Figure 24 has the objective of presenting a visual representation of the relevance it acquired as the main port of exit for the cocaine going to West Africa. The addition of “Latin-American Countries” represents the inclusion of the participation of small traffickers in the Central American and the Caribbean countries as transshipment points of the drug sent to Europe. As it was mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Brazilian government and the governments of those countries affected by drug trafficking are constantly implementing counternarcotic policies and increasing their international cooperation efforts DTOs; this cooperation cab be observed as the purple lines that connect the different countries.

Figure 23 Drug trafficking of cocaine to Europe during the 1990s and mid 2000s



Source: Created by the author

Figure 24 Drug trafficking of cocaine to Europe during mid 2000s and 2010s



Source: Created by the author

## 6.6 SME's observations about the Mexican expansion in the cocaine routes to Europe.

The last section presented the information about the evolution of the cocaine trafficking to Europe; at the same time, it triangulated the different variables presented earlier in this chapter. At this point, it is important to observe in the last section there was no mention of the Mexican DTOs in the explanations given by the SMEs about the evolution of the cocaine routes to Europe. Therefore, during each interview, I asked each SME about his or her knowledge in the specific participation of the Mexican DTOs in cocaine trafficking. From all the interviews and questionnaires answered by SMEs, none confirmed a long-lasting involvement of the Mexican DTOs in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. What is more, none confirmed with certainty that the Mexican DTOs were playing a relevant role in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. The present section presents the answers about the relevance of the Mexican DTOs in Europe.

There were some special considerations observed by SME 12 and SME 15. These two experts denied having information about an expansion of the Mexican DTOs to Europe. Nevertheless, they also presented special considerations in the possibility that the Mexican DTOs are part of the cocaine trafficking to Europe. During his interview, SME 12, stated that he did not know any recent case of Mexican cartels in Europe. However, he also observed the possibility that there could be a link and that "the procedures [of the investigation] are still in course, and it is reserved information" SME 12 (*pers.comm.*) 24 April 2018. At this point, undergoing investigations could confirm or deny the role that the Mexican DTOs. However, from all the group of SMEs, none confirmed any previous investigation that demonstrated a long-lasting transatlantic expansion of the Mexican DTOs.



In this regard, SME 15 (*pers.comm.*) 28 September 2018) gave an extensive answer about the absence of the Mexican DTOs as main transatlantic cocaine traffickers. In his own words, SME 15 explained that “if you try to seek the presence of the [Mexican] criminal organizations in Europe, you will hardly find it, if you try to do it in the way they operate in Mexico. What I mean is that you are not going to find mules, you are not going to find dealers, you are not going to find criminal leaders in Europe. You cannot do that. The bridges of communication and contact that you could find is of a different nature. It is through connections, through intermediaries. This is something that is never investigated, the role of the intermediaries in the criminal organizations.”

Although SME 15 clarified that to his knowledge, the Mexican DTOs do not have a main role in the cocaine trafficking to Europe, he explained that in general, different criminal organizations act differently in different parts of the world. The suggestion is that there is missing information about the role that intermediaries are taking in the cocaine routes to Europe. Furthermore, if there is participation from the Mexicans it would be as intermediaries, but there are no investigations about the intermediaries carried out by the security agencies because the authorities are more focused with the main organizations and overlook the power of the intermediaries.

In this same subject, SME 16 referenced the EUROPOL and INTERPOL reports that present information about the intermediary role plaid by the Mexican cartels. According to him, “you see that there are some brokers, some presence of the Mexicans in Europe, especially in Spain, in Italy, in countries like Belgium and Holland. Police were able to gather intelligence about suspicious presence of the people with ties to Mexican cartels. And they were able to gather evidence of the presence of those individuals in many countries in Europe.” (SME 16 (*pers.comm.*) 28 June 2018) Even when there is intelligence about the intermediary role plaid by the Mexican DTOs, there is no specific mention of any Mexican cartel. It could be said that Mexican DTOs are just part of the supply chain without being a relevant actor.

The way in which authorities could identify if the Mexican DTOs are playing a main role in cocaine trafficking is related to the analysis of the drug flow. At this point, SME 16 explained that “There is only one way to identify the flow of cocaine from Latin America to Europe and it’s the analysis from the seizures and if you go and look the seizures of cocaine in Europe, you see that many of them are relation to traditional criminal organization such as the ‘Ndrangheta, and sometimes, Serbians, the criminals from Serbia and Montenegro, the Albanian, and so we have very little examples, of little cases, few cases of Mexican being involved in a seizure of a shipment. So, for that reason we tend to believe that their role is not prominent.” (SME 16 (*pers.comm.*) 28 June 2018.

Similarly, SME 10 Explains that the Mexican DTOs are not a main actor in the cocaine trafficking in Europe because “the Colombians are still number one traffickers into Europe” (*pers.comm.*) 23 November 2017). In this regard, SME 10 explains that the presence of Mexican DTOs in Europe does not necessarily mean that they are looking to establish their control in cocaine routes. He has the example of the Mexican Sinaloa cartel engaging in laundering money in Spain, which would mean that there are relationships between Mexican DTOs and the Spanish OCGs. Nevertheless, SME 10 affirmed “I don’t think the purpose was to diversify the operations in Europe.”

This asseveration is linked to the business model that is being used by the DTOs around the world. SME 10 (*pers.comm.*) 23 November 2017) mentioned that the drug trafficking organizations “are adopting Harvard business management strategies, less hierarchical structures, flatter. They are hiring contractors to do things, certain aspects of the business operations, and they give a lot of autonomy to lower managers. They are adapting a very current business model that is very globalize as far as globalization.”

The observation of this globalized business model was also mentioned by SME 23. He worked during the 2000s in South America as part of the international strategies against cocaine trafficking. SME 23 recognized that in cocaine trafficking “you had this evolving process or behaviours where at the end of the day you could never predict, it would be impossible to predict and generalize specific groups, it comes from any direction you can think of in any way”(SME 23 (*pers.comm.*) 10 January 2019). He explained that while he was in the field, he would observe that the Mexicans had great influence in cocaine production places in Peru. However, in terms of who smuggles the cocaine to Europe, he concluded that the transatlantic trafficking is a very dynamic process that has too many actors involved.

### **6.7 Official documents that claimed the expansion of the Mexican DTOs to Europe.**

The most relevant piece of information at the beginning of my research was the DNA annual report 2015 because it stated that the Mexican cartels were at the “vortex of the pyramid” of the cocaine trafficking to Europe (2015, p.298). This document became really essential for my research because it was a governmental document that asseverated that the Mexican DTOs were playing a main role in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. This asseveration triggered my interest to research the expansion of the Mexican DTOs. For this reason, and as a way to clarify the degree of veracity of such allegation, I asked all the SMEs that were interviewed for this research if they had any knowledge or comment about such affirmation.

Similar to the previous section, the idea of asking this to the SMEs who have expertise in the Mexican DTOs or the cocaine flows to Europe was that they would know about such claims. However, the result was different because none of the SMEs acknowledged a major relevance of the Mexican DTOs in the cocaine flow to Europe. Considering the divergence, the structure of the present section is divided in two parts. The first one presents and analyses the claims made by official publications. The second part presents the empirical evidence gathered from the SMEs, clarifying the reliability of the documents.

In terms of the official documents, I took the DNA 2015 Annual report as an example and started checking previous documents from Italian security agencies. I reviewed all documents from the DNA between 2008 until 2015 to see the evolution of the alleged transatlantic power of the Mexican DTOs and observed a constant mention of the Mexican DTOs and their role in cocaine trafficking to Europe. The relevance of the 2008 was the realization of Operation “Solare” which tackled a cell from the Mexican Gulf cartel in New

York that was supplying cocaine to the Calabrian mafia who would ship it from New York to Italy (DNA, 2008, p.719). Operation “Solare” also known by the U.S. authorities as Operation “Reckoning” was a large operation carried out in different countries, but the mayor number of arrests were done in Italy and in the United States as it is explained in Appendix 4. For my research, the relevance of Operation Solare is that the Italian authorities constantly used this this international operation as proof of the relation between the Mexican and Italian criminal groups.

However, I was able to identify inconsistencies in the information announced by the DNA reports. While the DNA report for 2008, 2010 and 2011 links the Mexican Gulf cartel with the Calabrian mafia, the DNA 2012 report (2012, p.134) mentions Operation “Solare”, in reference to the Mexican Zetas. One could observe that there was a clarification in the investigations and that it was the Zetas, and not the Gulf cartel, who was involved in Italy. Nevertheless, in 2013 report, the DNA mentioned Operation “Solare” again in relation to the Mexican Gulf cartel and not the Zetas cartel.

Another inconsistency was observed in the reports for the years 2014 and 2015. In the report for the year 2014, the DNA mentioned that the Mexicans control the flow of cocaine to the U.S. and that the ‘Ndrangheta and the Nigerian criminal organisations control the flow to Europe (DNA 2015, p. 356). The next year, in the report of 2015, the DNA observes that “in the cocaine sector, the Mexican cartels, despite not having control of the places of production, by placing themselves between the South American producers and the consumers in North America and Europe, are at the vortex of the pyramid of narco traffic” (DNA, 2016, p. 298). The role of the Mexicans as main intermediaries in the drug flow to Europe is a different perspective than that presented in the 2014 report, and it claimed for further clarification about the information presented by this Italian agency.

Considering the Italian DNA affirmations, I reviewed the reports of the DCSA and the DIA. In 2008 the DCSA reported that Operation Solare was related to a Calabrian family, active in Canada and the U.S., with the Mexican Gulf cartel, who was “one of the channels supplying drugs to Calabrian families” (DCSAb, 2008, p.65). This was important because the operation pointed out a clear network between the Gulf cartel and the ‘Ndrangheta network. Furthermore, in 2009 the DCSA indicated that there was a possibility that the cartels are attempting to expand to Europe (DCSAa, 2009, p.8). This perception was presented again in 2010 where the agency mentioned that “although there is no irrefutable evidence that the Mexican groups are playing a role in the European market of cocaine, it is of common opinion that they are trying to penetrate the European market, undermining the activities of the Colombian DTOs in the continent”. (DCSAa, 2010, p.11).

In the 2012 report, the DCSA mentioned Operation “Solare” in relation to the Gulf Cartel, using it as an argument to show that the Mexicans are intermediaries in the cocaine routes and not attributing them a main role in the route to Europe (DCSAa, 2012, p.177). The next relevant mention of the Mexican DTOs was made in the annual DCSA 2015 report. The agency explains that the Mexican cartels have fragmented in Mexico due to the Mexican counter DTO strategies. In this sense, it mentions that the Zetas, the Gulf and the Sinaloa cartel had been weakened in their structure and modus operandi. (DCSAa, 2015, p.

27). From all the Italian reports that were reviewed between 2008 and 2015, this was the only acknowledgment of the changes that the Mexican DTOs were suffering inside Mexico.

Furthermore, the information presented by the DCSA in 2015 is in direct contradiction to the statements made by the DNA. While the former recognized the fragmentation that the Gulf and the Zetas cartel had suffered in Mexico, the latter affirmed that the Mexican DTOs were playing a major intermediary role in the drug routes to Europe. This information is similar to that presented in Chapter 4, where I explained that the DTOs, between 2008 and 2015, the Gulf cartel and the Zetas separated, and what is more, the Zetas began a war against the Gulf cartel around 2010. Furthermore, due to their violent profile, the decimation of the Zetas became a priority to the Mexican authorities at the beginning of the 2010s.

In respect to the DIA, in 2011 the DIA report for the second semester recognized the independency of the Zetas from the Gulf cartel. Furthermore, it states that the Zetas were collaborating with an Italian criminal “consortium” between groups in Gioiosa Jonica, Grotteria, Siderno, and Rosarno. However, it does not mention any specific operation related to this. Although the DIA reports from 2012-2014 did not mention the Mexican cartels as having any relevance, the DIA 2015 report repeated the statement about Operation Solare and the Zetas’ involvement (DIA, 2015.1, p.166). It also stated that the Mexicans are a intermediaries in the network of trafficking that goes from Colombia to Europe, controlled by the ‘Ndrangheta (DIA, 2015.2, p.100). The document links the Mexican cartels to the ‘Ndrangheta network but gives no further explanation of which cartels are involved and to what extent they participate in the illicit network.

At this point, there can be observed a lack of coordination between the anti-mafia agencies in Italy. Although they mentioned Operation Solare, there is a divergence of information the actors involved with the Italian mafia groups. At the same time, while the DNA claimed that the Mexican DTOs were “at the vortex of the pyramid” of cocaine trafficking to Europe and the U.S., the report of the DCSA expressed otherwise.

After observing the reports, I went to carry out the interviews with the SMEs. In this respect, I did not find any SME –not even those from Italy– that could provide any explanation about the relevance of the DTOs as projected in the Italian reports. In the same way, I was not able to confirm a long-lasting relation between the Mexican DTOs and the Italian mafia groups. In this regard, the most complete answer was given by SME 16. When I asked him his thoughts about the Mexicans being at the “vortex of the pyramid” in the cocaine trafficking to Europe as claimed by the DNA (2016) he said:

“I disagree because there is no evidence. We know that the Mexicans are already in Europe, but they are not as stringer organization like the Ndrangheta and many people are not willing to work with the Mexican cartels because they are scared that they can be, they can bring violence in Europe too, so they are very conflicted. They tend to be more conflictual like to conflict one another, to fight one another, so they tend to use violence often, and so the idea to deal with the Mexicans it’s not something that organizations like the ‘Ndrangheta prefer to do or like to do. Because the ‘Ndrangheta is an organization that tend to keep a low profile while the Mexicans, especially in Mexico, the Mexican cartels

are more violent, more visible. But some representative of the Mexican cartels are in Europe, but I don't think that they are as this report stated, on top of the pyramid of the cocaine flow from Latin America to Europe...

... One for the major police operation was the operation Solare. That operation uncovered the relationship between 'Ndrangheta family based in New York areas and representatives of the Gulf cartels and that was the first time of the police was able to observe a major relationship between the Ndrangheta and the Mexican cartels. The 'Ndrangheta historically tend to have relationships with criminal organizations based in Colombia, in Peru, in Bolivia because they need to buy directly from them the cocaine and not necessarily to deal with another organization that practically has the same function that 'Ndrangheta. So, the Mexican cartels, they don't produce cocaine, they just import cocaine and distribute it worldwide; so, the idea to join forces, that was the most important aspect, the new aspect. Because the Ndrangheta has great distribution in North America, especially in the US because they use the Montreal port. The Halifax port is the main port of entry for cocaine, so they cross the border using the Indian reservation. The idea to deal with the Mexican was also a trade opportunity because they would join force between two of the major distributors of cocaine in the world." (SME 16 (pers.comm.)28 June 2018).

Furthermore, when I asked if he knew another operation involving the Mexican cartels and the Calabrian group, SME 16 explained that "there is no other evidence of collaboration between Mexican cartels and 'Ndrangheta because they do the same things, so they don't need to work together." At this point, SME 16 clarifies that there is no cooperation for "one simple reason, because the 'Ndrangheta strategy is to minimize the cost, so the idea is to buy cocaine directly from Colombian, Bolivian and Peruvian producers, and not from organizations such as the Mexicans, because practically they have to purchase narcotics from Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and then re-sell in market on the cost and so it's not as much strategy to buy from a distributor when you can buy directly from the source and the producers. But they can get together and sometime working to purchase more cocaine to identify more different route of distribution. So, I think these two mayor criminal organizations, they can improve their relation in some way, but at the moment we don't have any evidence that they are working together or they are establishing any strategy to deal with this problem, in a collective way. So that [Operation Solare] was the only operation that uncovered a relationship between he 'Ndrangheta and a Mexican cartel." (SME 16 (pers.comm.) 28 June 2018).

The extensive answer from SME 16 helps us understand the logistics of drug trafficking. Even when the Mexican DTOs possess a historical and geopolitical advantage for the cocaine trafficking route to the United States, the same is not true in the routes to Europe. Mexico is the southern neighbours of the U.S., which makes the Mexican DTOs good allies for the routes that deliver cocaine to the U.S. even when Mexico does not produce such drug. However, the geographic location of Mexico, far from the Andean Region eliminates the Mexican DTO's strategic advantage in the routes to Europe.

What is more, even when Operation "Solare" was a case of cooperation between Mexican and Calabrian criminal organizations, this does not mean that such collaboration

lasted overtime. SME 15 explains that “The fact that one organization collaborates with another does not mean a constant relationship. It can signify that there simply was points of contact in a certain. Let’s say, for me, this is the oldest trick in the book, that of the contact with Italy, because basically what is done is collecting different recordings made by the Italian authorities in respect to the possible relations between the Zetas and the Ndrangheta. [...] I can’t say that there could have been some sort of connection at some moment when the Zetas were the strongest organization, but that relation is not necessarily constant along time” (SME 15 (*pers.comm.*) 28 September 2018).

Furthermore, is important to mention that none of the SMEs interviewed for this research had any knowledge about the alleged relevance of the Mexican DTOs or about a long-lasting relationship with the Calabrian group. In this respect, SME 7 ((*pers.comm.*) 26 January 2017) who worked in topics related to the cartels in a Mexican security agency until 2012, recognized not to have seen any cases regarding the expansion of the Mexican DTOs to Europe.

Similarly, SME 12 and SME 17 denied having known any cases that involved a relevant role of the Mexican DTOs in Europe. While SME 12 ((*pers.comm.*) 24 April 2018), mentioned not to have any knowledge about Mexican cartels dealing with Italian mafia groups; SME 16 denied any long-lasting relationship between the Mexican and the Calabrian groups. According to SME 16, “we don’t have any evidence that they [The Mexican DTOs] are taking orders from the Ndrangheta or from other major distributors for the cocaine” (SME 16 (*pers.comm.*) 28 June 2018). In this respect, SME 17 ((*pers.comm.*) 26 June 2018) expresses that “I don’t know what the Italians are basing that [the main role of the Mexican DTOs] on, and I’m not saying whether they are right or wrong, All I can say is, in my experience, I’ve seen very little, I won’t say none, but I’ve seen, very little reference in the UK to Mexican crime groups having a significant influence”.

Similarly, SME 27 explained that the Mexicans are not a main actor in transatlantic cocaine trafficking. He explains that there are different illicit players trafficking cocaine in Europe. “The Colombians themselves controlled the maritime routes to Europe, coordinating at the destination either with their own teams based in Europe, or with criminal groups based in each country. The Italian mafia played a role in coordinating importations into Italy but did not play a significant role in shipments to other European destinations countries.” (SME 27 (*pers.comm.*) 27 August 2019). Hence, diverse routes that ship cocaine to the different countries in Europe observe the participation of different criminal actors.

In an analogous answer, SME 27 denied that the Mexican DTOs could have a relevant role in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. The statement given by SME 27 ((SME 27 ((*pers.comm.*) 27 August 2019) was “I am not aware of any major involvement by Mexicans in the bulk flow of cocaine to the UK or Europe. I have never been aware of this in my entire 25 years on working in the area. There is no single group or nationality controlling the flow. Criminal Groups in Colombia (mainly Colombian nationals) work with criminal groups in Spain, Netherlands, UK, Italy, Albania and others, to coordinate shipments. There is no single nationality at the top of the pyramid.” At this point, it is important to observe that, according to the knowledge of the SMEs, the Mexican cartels do

not have a relevant role in the cocaine trafficking to Europe or specifically to Italy. This answers the original research question of my research.

### **6.8 Observations about the perceptions of the Mexican DTOs' role in the cocaine trafficking to Europe.**

Although documents from the Italian government claim that the Mexican DTOs are important actors in Europe, this situation was not acknowledged by any of the different SMEs interviewed for this research. Hence, it could be said that the documents present an erroneous perception of the real power of the Mexican DTOs. The next section observes this situation. It observes how the perception about the relevance of the Mexican DTOs in the cocaine routes to Europe is based, on the one hand, in the power that such DTOs have in the drug routes in the Americas. On the other hand, this perception is also based on the counter narcotic strategies implemented by Mexico since the 2006.

SME 15 explains that the perception that the Mexican DTOs as the most important cocaine organizations is a relative subject. He argues against those who claim that the Mexicans cartels are unique organizations in the criminal world, because it is an example of the lack of understanding of how the criminal organizations interact between each other at the international level. This refers to the importance that teamwork plays in achieving a constant flow of drugs from one place to the other. According to SME15:

“Attributing the power of omnipotence to the Mexican organizations means not understanding the real dynamic. When I went to the Dominican Republic they told me “here we have the biggest criminal groups and Punta Cana is one of the touristic zones with more presence [from OCGs] because there are many international flights not only the U.S. but also to Europe, to Paris, to Marseille, to different parts of Italy; and when you go further south and go to Brazil, there are other criminal organizations. And then, in Russia and in Japan, and the same in Europe.” (SME 15 (*pers.comm.*) 28 September 2018)

The message here is that each country and region have their own perspective about who is the main actor in the illicit activities. Any country or region could have different perspectives of which are the most relevant and dangerous criminal organizations. However, this perspective depends on the country, regardless of the real international power of the criminal organizations. Furthermore, what is true for one country or region, may be different for another.

The problem I observe is that such perception has transcended the documents and has become a common thinking. In my interview with SME 25 ( (*pers.comm.*) 21 May 2019) he explained that the information about the Mexican DTO power in the cocaine trafficking to Europe was related to open sources, mainly the Italian reports, that present Operation Solare as evidence. The explanation made by SME 25 is relevant because it shows how an Operation from 2008 has been constantly shaping the perception that the Mexican DTOs have relationships with the Italian Mafia. However, at this point, there is an additional consideration about the behaviour of both, the Italian and the Mexican DTOs that clarifies the relationship and the roles that both criminal actors have in the cocaine routes to Europe.

At this point, the constant reference to Operation Solare could have generated the perception of the Mexican DTOs as powerful transatlantic actors. In this regard, SME 24

that “there could had been some presence of the Mexican DTOs in Europe and that motivated an exaggerated perception about their operations in Europe (SME 24 (*pers.comm.*) 21 May 2019). In such way, SME 24 observes that the overreaction or constant mention of one case can generate the erroneous perception. What is more, SME 25 made an emphasis in observing that the meeting point for both organizations is not Italy or Europe, but the American city of New York. In his own words, SME 25 mentioned that “the Calabrian mafia who is trafficking cocaine to Italy has a stronghold in New York, U.S. [...] Now, the drug is not coming to Mexico via the Italians. Instead, the drug goes top Europe through the Mexican DTOs and other organizations that intervene in the process.” SME 25 (*pers.comm.*) 21 May 2019). The relevance of this explanation is that although the Calabrians may have a relationship with the Mexican DTOs for the supply of cocaine, this does not mean that the Mexican DTOs are expanding into Europe; it means that the Calabrian mafia has a presence in the United States. The relevance of this differentiation is that it clarifies that the Mexicans are not expanding into Europe, they are doing the same thing what they have been doing –trafficking cocaine to the U.S.– but with a new ally in New York, who happens to be re-shipping this drug to Europe. At this point, the relevant role the Mexican DTOs have in the cocaine trafficking to the United States is playing a role in shaping the perceptions about Mexican DTOs and their increasing role in the cocaine trafficking to Europe.

In this regard, SME 15 reiterated that “Mexico has not been, historically, a producer of cocaine.” This situation, and their location away from the producing region would take away any long-lasting possibility to become a main cocaine trafficker to Europe. The perception [that the Mexicans are at the vortex of the pyramid of cocaine trafficking to Europe] could be related to the fact that the Mexicans began to achieve authority at the international level because of their production of marihuana and poppy and because of their knowledge and relevance in drug trafficking to the U.S. But at this point I insist that I do not think that the Mexican DTOs have a presence in Europe, through leadership or people.” (SME 15 (*pers.comm.*) 28 September 2018). The relevance gained by the Mexican DTOs in the cocaine routes to the United States was explained in Chapter 5, and it is the outcome of the sequence of different critical junctures, like the end of the bi-cartel system in Colombia.

Similar perceptions were expressed by SME 6. She observed that although the Mexican DTOs do not produce cocaine, they became intermediaries for the Colombian producers. This allowed the Mexicans to acquire a relevant role in the cocaine routes to the U.S. At this point, the perception is that the Mexicans gained enough power so when “When the Colombians lost the possibility of establishing their own routes [to Europe], they used the Mexican cartels to ship cocaine to Europe.” (SME 6 (*pers.comm.*) 10 January 2017) In some way, this perception is following the evolution of the Mexican DTOs in Latin America. After the Colombian cartels were weakened, the Mexican DTOs took over, hence it could make sense that they could later take over the routes to Europe.

Likewise, during my interview with SME 23 I could notice the perception of the relevant that the Mexican DTOs had in the Americas as a variable that affected the perception of the Mexican’s intrusion into European cocaine trafficking. “So, if you take



for example, the DEA agents, they'd say the markets were for many years controlled by the Colombians, and that gradually the Mexicans moved in into the US market. They were very violent, and really took control of the cocaine flow to the US, so my argument there would be that if the price is three times as great in Europe, why would they not be doing it the same there?" (SME 23 (*pers.comm.*) 10 January 2019). Although SME 23 admitted that there was not enough evidence as to ensure that the Mexican DTOs were expanding to Europe; he insisted that "if they [the Mexican DTOs] used to manage the US market. Why not influence the European markets?" This shows his consideration towards the economic advantage of selling cocaine to the European market and the Mexican DTO power in the cocaine market in the Americas.

This perception was also observed in my interview with SME 7, who made a link between capacities that the Mexican DTOs had in Latin American cocaine routes, and the possibility that the DTOs would seek new opportunities in Europe. As stated by SME 7, "Once you have developed the knowhow the capacity and the individual skill set to get into the US market, and to obtain the cocaine from the Andean sources, there is no reason why you cannot use that expertise to look out for new markets, I would not be surprised at all." (SME 7 (*pers.comm.*) 17 January 2017). A similar statement was obtained by SME 10 ((*pers.comm.*) 23 November 2017). SME 10 stated that it would not be surprising that the Mexicans were playing a role in the Cocaine trafficking to Europe due to their maritime capacities in the Americas. This lack of surprise is related to the perception that the Mexican DTOs are powerful players in the cocaine routes that go from the Andean Region to the U.S. through Central America and Mexico. The documented power that the Mexicans play in the drug routes to the U.S. creates the perception that they could be powerful enough to transnationalise to Europe. However, the fact that there is a perception about it, does not imply that the Zetas, the Gulf or the Sinaloa cartel are attempting to control the cocaine flow to Europe.

The other independent variable that could affect the perception about the Mexican DTOs in Europe is the counter narcotic policies implemented in Mexico after the 2006. This variable is related to the effects that the counter narcotic policies have had in the Mexican DTOs. As the Mexican "War on Drugs" focused on diminishing the power and leadership of the DTOs, this could create the perception that the DTOs were pushed to new places. This idea was related to the work of Islas (2013) that showed how the "War on Drugs" carried out by President Calderon had the side effect of pushing DTOs like the Zetas cartel to expand their presence to other countries like Guatemala.

In this regard, SME 15 gives an explanation about the relation between the Mexican counter narcotic policies implemented in 2006 and the evolution of the perception of the Mexican DTOs as powerful international DTOs.

"One of the most relevant components of Calderon's strategy was the media, as evidence, a lot of the operatives that were done would end with detentions or seizures of different dugs, weapons etcetera, and all of that was communicated to the public, with a high mediatic impact. That mediatic impact was not only national, but also international. There is a before and after in terms of public perception at the national

and the international levels with the strategy of Felipe Calderon. They cause the acknowledgment of the existence of many Mexican criminal groups and many criminal leaders. [...] And, I believe that this impacted Europe. In our previous Interview I mentioned that there was a great mythology about the Mexican groups. That it was the same in the Fiji islands, than in the European Union, Africa, and America Latina and the United States, they tell you that the Mexican groups are the ones that are predominating. They'll say that the local criminal groups are having business with the Mexican groups, but that is not necessarily true. Let's say that with Calderon's strategy there was a global perception about the [Mexican] organised crime, the name of the groups became known, just as their leaders of those different groups." (SME 15 (*pers.comm.*) 28 September 2018)

SME 15 also mentioned how the communication strategy helped to mystify the leader of the Sinaloa cartel and give him international status. He explains that nowadays Joaquin Guzman Loera has achieved great popularity, comparing Mr Guzman to Al Capone in the United States. However for SME 15 it is unclear if the leader of the Sinaloa cartel had such an international popularity before 2006. However, the communication about the successes of the Governmental strategy also helped to increase the fame of the Mexican DTOs.

In the same way, SME 12, ( (*pers.comm.*) 24 April 2018) agrees with the statement of the propaganda. He specified that "the fight against drug cartels you [referring to the Mexican authorities] are conducting in Mexico and the media propaganda that follows contributes to influence public opinion in believing that the global problem [of cocaine trafficking] has a significant origin in your [Mexican DTO] problem." By constantly mediatizing the fight against the cartels, the war on drugs transformed the image of Mexico as a country and the Mexican DTOs. On one hand, it had the effect of boosting the international importance of the DTOs; and on the other hand it increased the image of Mexico as the country of origin of the problem.

A similar explanation was given by SME 24 ((*pers.comm.*) 21 May 2019) who proposes that the perception about the power of the Mexican cartels in Europe is caused by mediatic exaggeration. "we observe it [the perception] could had been affected by two things. 1) The media positioning of the "War on Drugs" of the Caledon's administration. 2) The information shared between the agencies about the activities of the Mexican DTOs in Europe." In this regards, the information that is shared between agencies can be limited by the perception of each agency. This is easily observed in the affirmations given by the different DNA reports, particularly the one for the year 2015 (DNA, 2016) that claimed that the Mexican DTOs were main actors in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. If another country's agency exchanges information with the DNA, they would have a different perception of the role of the Mexican DTOs than if they exchanged information with the DCSA who acknowledges the weakening process that the Mexican DTOs lived in Mexico. In summary she explains that "the mediatic positioning that came from the governmental strategy contributed to position the country and their criminal organizations in all the world" (SME 24 (*pers.comm.*) 21 May 2019).

The logic of such perception is related to a similar historic example. SME 6 explains that the idea that the Mexican DTOs are looking to expand their horizons could be linked to the pressure they suffer from the counter narcotic policies. In her own words, “The Colombian cartels lost the possibility of establishing their own routes and they use the Mexican DTOs to ship the cocaine to Europe. The non-desired effects of the success of the [Mexican] public policy could have lead the Mexican cartels to seek an alternative option in the European Market.” (*pers.comm.*) 10 January 2017). As it was explained in Chapter 5, when the Colombian DTOs were weakened by different counter-narcotic strategies in the Americas, the Mexican DTOs emerged as the relevant actor in the routes of cocaine from the Andean Region to the United States. In a similar way, the argument of SME 6 is that, as new counter-narcotic policies are targeting the Colombian traffickers in the cocaine routes to Europe, the Mexican DTOs would take advantage of this to expand their operations.

It is relevant to remember that this is a perception and does not confirm reality. The perceptions that the Mexican DTOs are main players in the cocaine trafficking to Europe is related to the documentation that the Mexicans have a main role in the cocaine trafficking routes of the Americas. In the same way, it is also related to the strategies implemented by President Calderon in 2006. At this point, the SMEs paid special attention to the communication strategy as something that help to increase the fame of the Mexican cartels at the international level. In other words, the communication about how many operations and successes the Mexican strategy had in terms of the fight against the DTOs had the side effect of creating the perception that the Mexican DTOs were very powerful. At the same time, this had helped to understand the perception that the Mexican DTOs were main traffickers in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. As it was explained in this chapter, there is no evidence that confirms a long lasting relation between the Mexican and the Italian DTOs, or an expansion of the Mexican DTOs to Europe.

### **6.9 Analysis of the independent variables triangulating them with the empirical information.**

After presenting the answers of the SMEs, it can be said that none of the SMEs support the Italian government claims of Mexican DTOs being major players in trafficking cocaine to Europe. Furthermore, none consider the Mexican cartels as an important actor in the transatlantic cocaine routes. At this point, there is no doubt that in 2008 Operation “Solare” demonstrated that the Mexican Gulf cartel was taking part in the cocaine trafficking routes that supplied the ‘Ndrangheta. However, it was confirmed that there is no proof of a long-lasting relationship during the 2010s. As observed in Chapter 4, the Gulf cartel suffered changes. Between 2006 and 2012 the Gulf Cartel and the Zetas broke up. After this, the Zetas began a turf war against the Gulf cartel, which weakened in great measure the capacities and capabilities of the cartel. Bringing the contexts together after 2008, the Gulf cartel was not only fighting a war against its former military branch, it was also defending itself against the federal agencies and against other cartels that sought control of the trafficking routes to the U.S. through north-eastern Mexico.

In this regard, SME 15 noted that the new counter-narcotic strategies implemented by Calderón generated the weakening and division of the cartels. As the cartels struggled to keep their organisations whole while selecting new leaders, they fought each other, trying to take advantage of each other's weaknesses ( (*pers.comm.*) 28 September 2018). As it was explained in Chapter 4, the Gulf cartel's power as a criminal organization was severely affected after the Zetas separated. However, even when the Zetas became a very powerful organization during the first years of the 2010s, they lost their organizational criminal power when they lost the main members of its leadership. This disorganisation created chaos inside the criminal structures of the Mexican DTOs in Mexico, and at the same time, it weakened the cartels at the international level.

Thanks to the information collected from the SMEs and the analysis made about the evolution of the cartels in Chapters 4 and 5 (about the history of the Mexican cartels, and about the regional circumstances that allowed their empowerment in the Americas) I can confirm that the DNA reports are incongruent with the reality lived by the Mexican cartels. The SMEs gave answers that emphasized that the Italian information is not accurate because there is no evidence about it. What is more, in regard to a long lasting relationship between the Mexican cartels and the Italian mafias, the SMEs commented not to have seen any evidence about this. The best explanation provided by SME 16 was that the 'Ndrangheta group seeks to maximize its profits and that is why they go directly to the Colombian producers instead of using the Mexicans as intermediaries.

In this regard, as mentioned by SME 27 ((*pers.comm.*) 27 August 2019), there is no criminal group at the top of the pyramid. What I am rearing to is that they are all members of the international illicit network that participates in the flow of cocaine. This means that there is no single actor administrating the cocaine routes to Europe, but it is a network in which numerous actors participate. What is more, these actors vary according to the developing circumstances. In other words, the illicit actors have reached a point of international cooperation in which they work towards improved efficiency, participating in the transhipment points when it is needed, and waiting when it is not feasible.

This situation is logical when compared to the evolution of the cocaine routes to Europe. As explained in the second section of this chapter, the cocaine was shipped directly from South America to Europe until the affected countries in Europe implemented strategies against this. As the consumption, did not diminished, the cartels were incentivized to find a new way through West Africa, creating new alliances with African criminal organisations on the one hand, and with countries in Central and North America on the other hand. However, these changes are fast and wide, which makes it very unlikely that there is one sole player controlling the transatlantic cocaine flow.

My analysis at this point is that each DTO adapts to their circumstances and capacities. An example of this is observed in the role of West African criminal networks in the cocaine trafficking explained earlier in this chapter. In the overall cocaine trafficking to Europe, the routes through West Africa represent only one part of the overall flow of cocaine. However, for the West African countries it is of utmost importance due to the way

in which the illicit in West Africa, empowered by their criminal activities, jeopardise the countries' stability and rule of law.

### 6.10 Conclusion

The first parts of this chapter presented information about the evolution of the cocaine trafficking to Europe. The objective was to understand the evolution and it was thought with the idea that the participation of the Mexican DTOs was going to be documented naturally as part of the evolution of the routes. This section gave information to understand how the evolution of cocaine trafficking in Europe was related to the increase of the demand during the 2000s, and to the counter narcotic policies implemented by the affected countries. However, these policies were focused on alleviating the observed influx of drugs, which had the side effect of forcing the DTOs to seek new routes through different countries in different regions of the world. In this regard, it was analysed how the emergence of Africa and Brazil as transshipment points was a reaction to counter narcotic policies implemented in Europe. The transnational factor of the problem makes it more complex because, on the one hand, the countries have the autonomous and sovereign right to implement counter narcotic policies of their choosing. On the other hand, such security policies may cause collateral side effects to other countries in the region or in other regions that are unaware of the possible side effects of other countries policies.

These observations match for the case of the internationalisation of cocaine routes in the Americas and in Europe. Chapter 5 discussed how national counter narcotic policies in foreign countries, like the dismissal of the bi-cartel system in Colombia, had the capacity of generating business and growing opportunities for DTOs in other countries like Mexico. In the case of Europe, the policies implemented first by Spain, generated a diversification of routes to other European countries. Further coordinated counter narcotic efforts in the European countries provoked further diversification of routes, including the rising position of West African countries and Brazil as transshipment points. However, on this first part there was not enough evidence to confirm the relevance of the Mexican DTOs in the cocaine flow to Europe. For this reason, the next sections presented the answers given by the SMEs about the Mexican participation in the transatlantic cocaine supply, and also about the main role that the cartels allegedly had according to the Italian DNA reports.

At this point, an in-depth observation of the Italian documents led to the understanding that there is no public recent confirmation that the Mexican cartels are playing a significant role with the 'Ndrangheta. On the one hand, the review of the DCSA, DIA and DNA reports showed a constant and confusing reference to Operation Solare from 2008. On the other hand, none of the SMEs interviewed on the subject confirmed the continuation of a strong business relation between the Italian mafia groups and the Mexican cartels. What is more, all the reports that claimed that the Mexican DTOs were relevant actors in the European cocaine supply made reference to Operation Solare as the only evidence of the Mexican expansion.

Hence, instead of clarifying the expansion of the Mexican cartels to Europe, the analysis showed that the information provided by the Italian agencies is questionable and rebutted by the SMEs interviewed on the subject. In summary, the evidence presented in this chapter answers the research question presented at the beginning of my research because it makes it possible to confirm that the Mexican cartels are not relevant actors in the Cocaine routes to Europe. Moreover, it also confirmed that that they are not having a long-lasting alliance with the Italian mafia groups.

## Chapter 7 Concluding remarks about the independent variables that are shaping the transnationalization of Mexican DTOs

### 7.1 Introduction

The main aim of my thesis was to clarify whether or not the Mexican cartels were expanding their influence in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. The original idea for such topic came from the acknowledgment that the Italian security agencies reported that the Mexican cartels had a significant role in the cocaine trafficking to Europe (DNA, 2016, p. 298); and that the Mexican cartels had established business relations with Italian mafia groups (DNA, 2009; DIA, 2009; DCSAa, 2010). When I first read the Italian documents, I assumed they were grounded in long-lasting evidence. My preoccupation at that time was that if the Mexican cartels had already a constant influx of revenue from the cocaine commercialized in the US, an expansion of their activities to Europe would make them become unstoppable corruptive violent entities in Mexico.

The literature review carried out at the beginning of this thesis made it possible to observe that most of the research is focused on the role that the Mexican DTOs have in Mexico and Latin America. I noticed that some authors (e.g. Astorga 2012 and 2015; Chabat 2010b; Benitez, Rodriguez-Sumano and Rodriguez, 2009) are focused on explaining the historical development of the cartels, while others focus their attention to understanding the violence (e.g. Rosen and Zepeda, 2014; Azaola, 2013; Mejía, Castillo and Restrepo, 2014), and counter narcotic policies implemented against DTOs (Serrano, 2007; Astorga and Shirk, 2010). In this regard, I noticed that there is a lot of interest in the activities carried out by the Mexican cartels and their evolution as main cocaine traffickers to the U.S.

However, my review showed that there is insufficient academic research about the role that the Mexican DTOs are playing in the cocaine routes to Europe. Most of the documents that perceive a relevant role of the Mexican DTOs were published by the Italian authorities. The perception of the Italian government, added to the relevance that the Mexican DTOs have in Mexico and some parts of Latin America were the main variables from which I draw my hypothesis. On the one hand I knew that the through the annual reports of the DNA, the Italian authorities showed their perception that the Mexican DTOs were main actors in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. On the other hand, the criminal power of the DTOs in Mexico and their transnational illicit activities in the Americas could be shaping this perception. Hence, my hypothesis was that *the perceived increase in the importance of the Mexican DTOs in the cocaine trafficking to Europe since the 2000s may be linked to two independent variables that can be better understood through the application of historical institutionalism in international relations; on the one hand it is a consequence of the counter narcotic strategies implemented in Mexico after 2006 and on the other hand it is related to the strengthening role that Mexican cartels have on the cocaine routes in Latin America.*

The methodology carried out to test my hypothesis and answer my research question was presented in chapter two. I decided to use qualitative methods approach because it helped me cope with the unavailability of reliable quantitative information. Furthermore, I

developed an embedded case study type (see Figure 2, p.41) modifying it to adapt a transnational context. The case observed the Mexican DTOs cartels as the units of analysis and their international expansion to Europe as the phenomena to be studied in a transnational context.

The idea to use Historical Institutionalism came from the historical approach taken by many authors who study the subject in Mexico and the Americas. Through the literature review I recognized the relevance that background of the DTOs and the sequence of different events had in the historical strengthening of such organizations. At this point, the identification of the critical junctures, the path dependency and sequencing, postulated by the Historical Institutionalism aided in widen my comprehension of the Mexican DTOs and the events that led them to become transnational actors in the Americas. Moreover, I used Institutionalism in International Relations to be able to explain the decisions made by the drug cartels in the international level. At this point, I decided to recognize the DTOs as actors of the international relations, because they have the capacity to establish relationships and coordinate activities with different criminal organizations in different countries.

At this point, acknowledging the evolution of the role that the Mexican cartels have had in transnational cocaine trafficking was vital for my study. The first step was to develop a deepened understanding of the units of analysis. I decided to develop detailed explanations of each of the units of analysis (the Sinaloa, the Gulf and the Zetas cartels) because I wanted to observe the interactions that took place in the illicit world in which the cartels develop their activities. Chapter 4 presented the history of the units of analysis, identifying critical junctures and path dependency. In addition, this chapter presented the parallel evolution of the counternarcotic policies implemented in Mexico, and the effects that such policies had in the cartels. It was observed that the strategy of targeting the leadership of the cartels caused instability and separation within the organizations.

At this point, I observed the importance of three critical junctures that were vital to answer my research question. The first was the decision took by Osiel Cardenas, leader of the Gulf Cartel, to create the Zetas as a paramilitary branch composed of former military personnel. Cardena's decision was the beginning of a path the pendency for the Zetas, as a military branch they plaid a role in the war between the Sinaloa cartel and the Gulf cartel. Furthermore, when the Zetas split from the Gulf cartel, their previous consolidation as a paramilitary branch was a strength used by the group to severely debilitate the Gulf cartel.

The next critical juncture occurred with the extradition of Osiel Cardenas Guillen to the U.S. The loss of Gulf's leadership caused by the extradition of Cardenas during the second half of the 2000s had the effect braking up the relationship between the Gulf cartel and its military branch, the Zetas. At this point, the Zetas established themselves as one of the most powerful cartels in Mexico. The power of the Zetas as an organization ended with the arrest of their main leaders, the Treviño brothers. These arrests can be seen as the next critical juncture because after the loss of its leadership the organization start fracturing and losing its power before the mid-2010s.

The relevance of these three critical junctures was that by the 2010s, the Gulf cartel was no longer a relevant DTO in Mexico because it was severely decimated during its war



with the Zetas. Then between 2011 and 2014 the Zetas were devastated as an organization, losing their status as one of the main DTOs in Mexico. Hence, neither of the DTOs could have had the power to gain a relevant role in the cocaine routes to Europe because both were struggling with the divisions caused by the loss of their leaders.

My next step was to understand how the cartels were affected by variables exogenous to Mexico. Hence, Chapter 5 presented an analysis of how different sequences of events in Colombia, the Caribbean and Central America had an impact in the Mexican DTOs and their first transnationalization to Latin America. The end of the cocaine route through the Caribbean had the effect of bringing together the Colombian and the Mexican DTOs during the 1980s and the 1990s. Then, the counter narcotic policies implemented in Colombia and the subsequent dismissal of the Cali and the Medellin cartel's allowed the Mexicans to become the main traffickers of cocaine to the U.S. In parallel events, the pacification of the Central American civil conflicts allow the Mexican DTOs not only to establish alliances and administrate cocaine routes through the region, but also to have a physical presence in countries like Guatemala.

The process of analysing the expansion of the Mexican DTOs to Europe was a more difficult task. While many authors have studied the Mexican DTOs and the narcotraffic problem in the Americas, there is little research of the role that the Mexican DTOs have in Europe. For this reason, my first concern was to understand the context and variables that affect cocaine trafficking in Europe. Therefore, Chapter 6 presented and analysed how exogenous variables, like the constant demand for cocaine, were vital for the establishment of cocaine trafficking. Then, I presented the empirical evidence about the evolution of the cocaine routes to Europe. At this point, the empirical evidence gathered from the SMEs answered my research question, demonstrating that the Mexican DTOs do not play a relevant role in the cocaine smuggling to Europe. The following section combines the knowledge gathered from the analysis of each and every previous chapter, and it presents my observations in respect to the evidence and the perceptions of the transnationalization of the Mexican cartels.

## **7.2 The powerful Mexican cartels, perception versus reality.**

The main interest of my thesis was related to the alleged expansion that the Mexican DTOs were having to Europe through cocaine trafficking. My research question was focused in clarifying if the Mexican DTOs had or not, a relevant role in the cocaine routes to Europe as it was presented by several reports of Italian agencies. Following the research question, my hypothesis tried to visualise the relationship between the perception of the transatlantic expansion of the Mexican DTOs and two independent variables, the counternarcotic policies in Mexico, and the strengthened role of the Mexican DTOs in Latin America.

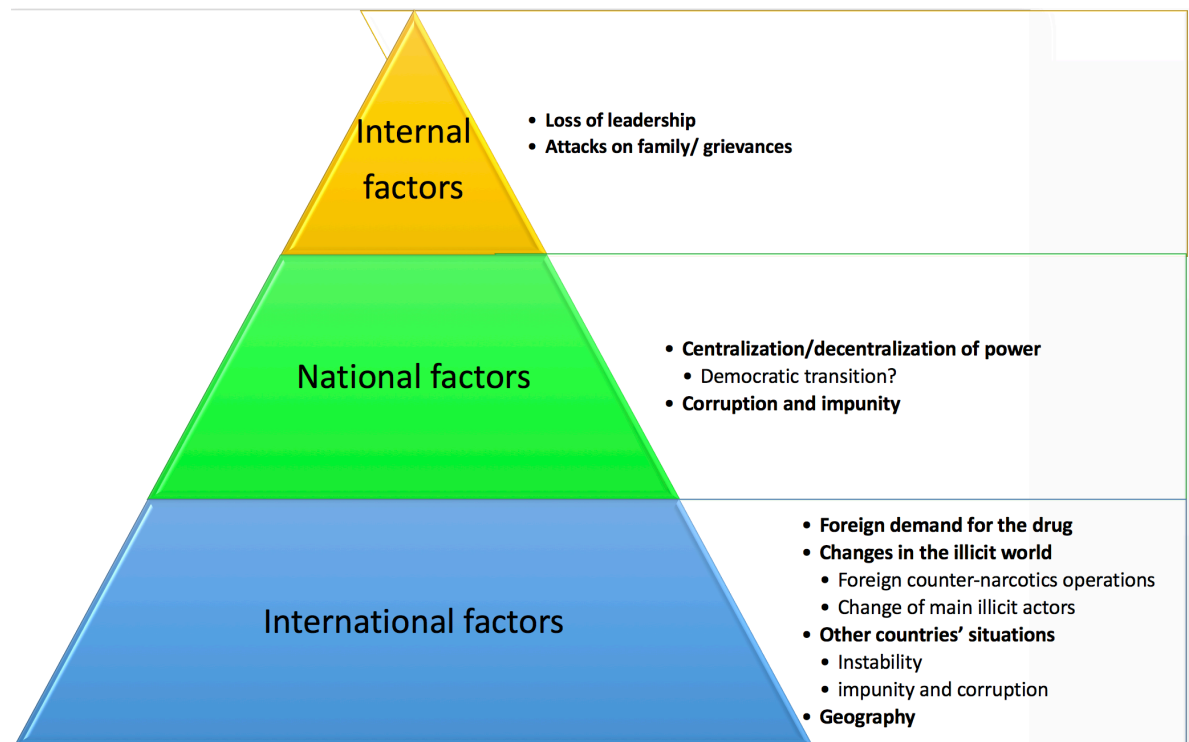
By studying the characteristics of the national and international variables presented in Chapter 4, 5 and 6, I have determined that the Mexican DTOs are not expanding to Europe. The perception at this point was observed through the answers given by the SMEs. As it was presented in Chapter 6, the different SMEs clarified that there is no evidence that

proves that the Mexican DTOs are having a relevant role in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. However, as it was shown, many of them entertained the possibility due to the perception that they have about the power of the Mexican DTOs.

When I started this thesis I myself, had the perception that the cartels were increasing their power in the cocaine routes to Europe. My original ideas were based on the different Italian reports (DNA, 2008, 2010 and 2012), that given the European market opportunities, the Mexican cartels would be increasingly working to take advantage of the European demand. This perception turned out to be erroneous. However, the process of answering the research question lead me to get a better understanding of the behaviour of the Mexican cartels and the reason why there is no evidence that they are expanding to Europe.

This understanding about the behaviour of the cartels is related to the critical junctures and circumstances that have the capacity of affecting the evolution of the DTO in question. These findings were obtained thanks to the application of Historical Institutionalism, which allowed the identification of critical events that influence the evolution of the DTOs' organizational structure, criminal capacities and international outreach. I grouped this critical events, calling them Internal, National and International variables. Figure 25 presents a summarized version of my classification which is explained in the following section.

Figure 25 Variables that alter the behaviour of the DTOs



Source: created by the author

### 7.3 Internal variables

The internal factors refer to the events happening inside the illicit world. The loss of leadership has the capacity to cause intra-cartel conflicts as it was explained in Chapter 5. Once a leader is gone, some members and factions of the organisation may fight each other for the leadership of the group. An example of this was the evolution of the Gulf cartel and the Zetas narrated by SME 6 ((pers.comm.) 19 January 2018) and SME 15((*pers.comm.*) 28 September 2018), the extradition of Osiel Cardenas Guillen and later disputes lead to the separation and open war between both groups.

Additionally, the loss of leadership can provoke inter-cartel conflicts. This means that another DTO observed the loss of leadership as a weakness within the rival organisation and it takes advantage to increase its power in the illicit scenario. Following the example of the Gulf cartel, once Cardenas Guillen was arrested the Sinaloa cartel began an offensive trying to take the control of the Tamaulipas border crossings (Stewart, 2012).

The next internal factor are the attacks on family members. As explained in Chapter 4 personal disputes between the leaders can be the beginning of revenge wars, causing inter-cartel conflicts in the illicit system. This situation can lead to braking up alliances and violent wars between the DTOs. As it was previously analysed, these variables create instability inside the DTO system and produce violence.

### 7.4 National variables

The democratization of Mexico led to the loss of the hierarchical exploitative structure between the Government and the cartels (Astorga, 2012). This case study has demonstrated that the power vacuums left by the end of a centralized political structure lead to a fracture in the order between the legal actors and the illicit actors (see Chapter 4, section 4.3). The main observation is that 1) as the illicit actors got more independence due to the decentralization of power from the PRI during the 1990s (Lupsha, 1991, pp.41-42); and 2) the parallel increase of illicit business from some groups like the Sinaloa Cartel with illicit groups in South America (DOJ-Western District of Texas (2019, para.8). These gave the Mexican DTOs the means to increase their corruption capacities and ensure impunity.

An additional factor refers to the levels of corruption and impunity of the DTO home country. The more corruption and impunity there is in a country, the easier it is for an illicit actor to infiltrate the licit world and create networks that defy the original purpose of the governing bodies. At this point, the development of such corruption networks was happening in Mexico while the democratic transition was taking place and while the international circumstances in Latin America were opening new opportunities for the cartels to empower themselves (see Chapter 4)

Some specific example of the interaction of these variables with organised crime can be observed in Chapter 4, with the case of the Camarena assassination; in the evolution of the inter-cartel violence lead by the Sinaloa cartel. The consequences of Camarena' torture and assassination were the arrest of the leadership of the Guadalajara carte, leading to its disintegration. Furthermore, the growth of the cartels included a construction of a corruption network to ensure impunity for their illicit actions as it was explained in Chapter 4. My argument is that this interaction created a circle because the more corruption and impunity

there was, the more the cartels could grow in their illicit activities; the more illicit activities, the greater their corruptive power. What is more, this conditions interacted with the progressive empowerment of DTOs and the constant competition between the organisations, and eventually lead to the outbreak of violent confrontations.

### 7.5 International variables

The international variables in the Americas and in Europe were developed in Chapters 5 and 6, where it is now possible to compare the evolution of the drug trafficking context in both regions. Among all the variables that were developed (civil conflicts, counter narcotic foreign policies, national strategies and demand behaviour) I consider that the most important factor is the inelasticity of the demand for cocaine. This relates to the logic that as long as there is a constant demand for cocaine, there are enough incentives for DTOs around the world to establish supply routes to meet the demand.

Referring to the changes in the illicit world, it was noticed that counter narcotic policies in one country have the capacity of affecting the illicit actors in another country. An example of this can be seen in the policies against the cocaine routes through the Caribbean route were an incentive for the Colombian cartels to seek further cooperation with the Mexican DTOs. The second one refers to exogenous changes in the illicit actors at the international level. The end of the bi-cartel system opened a power vacuum that was fulfilled by the Mexican cartels. In the words of SME 19, anecdotally, and with some evidence, Colombian cartels no longer control the entire cycle of cocaine, much of that has been taken over by Mexican cartels” (*pers.comm.*) 21 August 2018). The disappearance of actors in Colombia, had a beneficial effect for the Mexican cartels. In other words, the appearance or disappearance of illicit actors in a certain country has the capacity of impacting the empowerment of illicit actors in another country.

Another international variable was the situation in other countries in terms of stability, corruption and impunity. Two regional examples presented in the thesis were Central America (see Chapter 5) and West Africa (see Chapter 6). The lack of development and governmental instability, made it easier for DTOs to take advantage and expand their activities within the local illicit networks of such countries. At this point it can be said that these two variables can be identified as confounding variables because they both, are an enabler that allows the Independent variable to affect the dependent variable. In other words, the existence of regions that can be used for transshipping drugs affects the trafficking routes and the power of the main players that are taking part in such activities.

The last variable of significant importance refers to the geography of countries in the global drug trafficking dynamics. Geography was an advantage for DTOs to develop drug trafficking networks in the countries in Central America (Seelke et al. 2011, 7; UNODC, 2012, p. 22) and the West African countries (USAID, 2013, p.7; UNODC, 2007, p.6). Both regions offer alternative routes to the two main consumers in the world. Speaking of the geographical advantage of Africa, SME 26 explained how the use of West Africa was a divergence strategy to avoid the counter narcotic policies against Latin American shipments. (*pers.comm.*) 5 June 2019). Thanks to this factor, the countries in both regions became strong transshipment points in the trafficking of cocaine.

## 7.6 The Mexican DTOs' expansion to Europe: a mere illusion

The idea of the Mexican expansion to Europe came from Italian LEAs reports and that gave birth to my research question about whether if the Mexican DTOs were expanding to Europe. However, the arguments presented in the Italian LEA documents lack evidence when they are analysed within the context lived by the Mexican DTOs and the context of cocaine trafficking to Europe. During the present decade, the Mexican DTOs had been dealing with different internal and external conditions that complicated their transatlantic expansion. The first conditions are internal to the illicit world of the Mexican DTOs. The intra-cartel and inter-cartel conflicts explained in Chapter 5 are distracting and weakening the organisations as they need to be constantly fighting attacks from their rivals. What is more, these conflicts are affected by the constant efforts of the LEA agencies. Specifically, the dismantling of the leadership of the Gulf cartel and later of the Zetas cartel lead to the fracture and weakening of both organisations between 2008 and 2015.

The numerous DNA, DIA and DCSA Annual Reports that talk about the expansion of the Mexican DTOs use the example of Operation Solare as a main proof of the expansion of the Mexican Gulf and Zetas cartels. However, such documents demonstrate the lack of understanding of the context that such organisations lived in Mexico. More specifically the aftermath of the fracture amongst the Zetas and the Gulf cartel. Between 2008 and 2010, the Zetas became an independent organisation and they began a war against the Gulf cartel that deeply weakened the latter. During its first years as an independent organisation, the Zetas was adapting and building its drug trafficking network, which made it less likely to have a transnational presence overseas. They became powerful in Mexico, but its organisational strength was temporary because the organisation fractured after the capture of the Treviño brothers. This alteration weakened the national power that the Zetas had acquired and their capacities to generate lasting international agreements with other organisations.

I do not contest the results of Operation “Solare” in terms of the Gulf cartel shipping cocaine to New York and having a contact to use New York as transshipment point in a route to Italy. However, having a business agreement to supply the ‘Ndrangheta with cocaine through their contacts in New York is not the same thing as increasing their presence or expanding their operations to Europe. Furthermore, after 2008 the fracture and loss of its territorial holdings in Mexico, it is not likely that the Gulf cartel had the same international projection.

This analysis shows the transatlantic expansion of the Gulf cartel did not continue after the beginning of the inter-cartel conflict between the Zetas and the Gulf cartels in Mexico. By looking at the internal and the national circumstances of the cartels, it is possible to understand that the Gulf cartel was weakened by the conflict with the Zetas. At the same Zetas were fighting, defending themselves from the Gulf and from the other cartels. At this point, there is only other similar evidence about the relation between the Mexican DTOs and the Italian Mafia. The work of Rodriguez examines the relationship between the Zetas and the ‘Ndrangheta (Rodriguez, C, 2009). She reviews the case of Operation Solare, presenting as empirical evidence the transcripts of the phone calls between criminal actors that lead to the operation. However, she does not acknowledge the divergences in the Italian

agency reports, nor does she mention that at the time of the investigation, the Zetas was in the process of fragmenting from the Gulf cartel.

In terms of the expansion of the Mexican cartels to Europe or Italy, none of the interviewees mentioned any specific drug cartel as having an expansive role in Europe or Italy. Some of the SMEs (SME 16, June 2018; SME June 23 and SME 17, January 2019) mention that there would not be surprising if there was presence of Mexican traffickers in Europe due to the high revenue of cocaine in the continent and the power that the Mexican DTOs have in Latin America. However, none of them mentioned the Mexicans as being main players in the cocaine routes. Furthermore, SME 16 mentioned Operation Solare saying that it was truth that the Mexican cartels and the 'Ndrangheta had business together are that point of time. Nevertheless, that business relationship is over now because the Ndrangheta strategy is to reduce trafficking costs hence so they buy directly from the producer countries (SME 16 (*pers.comm.*) 26 Jun 2018).

At this point, it is very important for future researchers to differentiate international expansion from business arrangements. An expansion is observed in the way the Mexican cartels increased their operations in Central and South America during the 1990s and 2000s. They became a relevant player in the administration of the cocaine flow from the cocaine shipped from Colombia to the United States. A business arrangement differs from an expansion because it only involves the agreement to create business. The best example is the 'Operation Solare' in which Mexican DTOs had an agreement to supply an Italian/American DTO cell in New York, and that cell coordinated the shipment of cocaine to Europe. In this case, the role of the Mexican DTO ends when the drugs arrive to the transshipment points in New York.

### **7.7 Dark, adaptive and horizontal: the new cocaine trafficking network.**

The empirical information collected for this study did not confirm an expansion of the Mexican cartels to Europe. Instead, it showed that there is no evidence that the Mexican DTOs are playing a relevant role in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. However, the collection of the evidence led to a more interesting finding about trafficking dynamics. The process of cocaine trafficking from the Americas to Europe has become a multidimensional network in which illicit actors from all around the world are involved in specific actions.

This finding was made through the process I followed to answer my research question. The questionnaire for the interviews included the question that asked the participants to explain the evolution of the cocaine flow to Europe. The idea was to observe how the Mexicans became leaders in the cocaine trafficking. However, from all the participants who answered this question, none mentioned any of the Mexican cartels. Furthermore, all talked about the diversification of routes and actors. This process was replicated with the African SMEs, leading to same answer about the diversification of actors.

Following this observation, I began an inverse process regarding the research question. Instead of finding the explanation about the power of the Mexicans in Europe, I observed that there was not one main actor in the cocaine routes to Europe. This represented

a difference to the cocaine routes to the U.S., where the Colombians and then the Mexicans had the primary role between the 1980s, the 1990s and the 2000s.

The next step was to observe the circumstances of the cocaine trafficking in Europe to understand the context in which the Mexican DTOs were allegedly expanding their influence. At this point, I confirmed that there was very little mention of the role of the Mexican cartels.

When I asked the UK's and Italian SMEs about the routes of cocaine to Europe I expected to observe an acknowledgment of the role of the Mexicans. However, this did not happen.

The SMEs talked about the diversification of actors and routes. SME 16 (*pers.comm.*) 26 Jun 2018) included groups such as the Italian 'Ndrangheta, and the OCGs from Montenegro, Albania and Serbia as main groups in the cocaine trafficking within Europe, and at the same time he mentioned the evolution of the routes through West and Central Africa as adaptation to foreign circumstances. In this respect, SME 17 (*pers.comm.*) 18 June 2018) stated the routes got "to diverse, the routes of cocaine coming to the UK are really diverse, there is cocaine going to the coast of West Africa, then northern Africa and then to Europe, we got yate [using yates] trafficking coming from the Caribbean"

In this respect, SME 18 (2018) explained that the drug supply adapts to remain available to the users:

"in the 1980s there were a few senior figures within organised crime who had relationships with Latin America, and they would be out there, they would visit and they would set up funding streams to buy cocaine and they would have transport logistics to bring it back, but these were isolated individuals.

Because of globalization and because of the way that the internet has influence the industry, there are now many more people from a range of nationalities who are involved in organised crime, the UK is the most multi-cultural country in Europe, in terms of demographic and how many foreign nationals there are established here, and those legitimate communities are exploited by criminals from their countries who hide amongst them. So, what we've seen over the last 30 years is, when I was in the 1990s, you can probably say four or five nationalities were involved in cocaine trafficking to the U.K. Now it's over 30. So, that brings intrinsic locations such as West Africans with Spanish, Dutch, all these countries had grown in their significance to use them as primary transit locations. All the transport capabilities that go with those countries are now being used and exploited so it's gone from being something quite simplistic to something being really complex, in terms of very efficient because there are so many more people doing it with access to so many more resources" (SME 18 (*pers.comm.*) 25 July 2018)

This evolution of the trafficking phenomena has been a constant in terms of cocaine trafficking. I think that this finding is particularly relevant because the complexity of this network, described in the previous chapters, makes it almost impossible for national counter narcotic policies to work against the transnational threat. This goes back to the observations described in Chapter 6, related to the fact that countries engage in national policies against the DTOs, but such policies have no diminishing impact in the international flow of the

drug. The national counter narcotic policies only force the illicit actors to adapt and seek new ways to prevail in their illicit business.

### 7.8 The paradox of referencing

The next is a methodological finding relating to the study of the Mexican Cartels and the open source information that can be found about such organisations. The finding is the fallacy of some pieces of information that seem to be empirical data, but that was misinterpreted by the publishing source, and the requoted by several secondary sources. I decided to all this situation “**the paradox of referencing.**” Part of the steps I took during this research included to review of publications that announced and confirmed that the Mexican DTOs were some of the strongest criminal organizations. As it was observed in the previous chapter, the Italian governments kept quoting the same operation to show the Mexican involvement in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. The relevance of this is that in a later review of further publications I noticed that this information is taken by other sources and quoted generating a misunderstanding about the international expansion of the Mexican Cartels. An example of such publications can be seen with later publications (Belasso, 2018; Corcoran 2011; Kleiman and Hawdon, 2011).

One of the findings of this research is the lack of official sources that verify what the newspapers are saying. One example of this chain can be observed with the UK Business Insider’s article “‘El Chapo’ Guzmán’s key role in the global cocaine trade is becoming clearer” by Christopher Woody. Talking about the great power of the Sinaloa Cartel in Mexico, Mr. Woody makes reference to a Spanish Newspaper “El País” reporting that “According to the Spanish newspaper El País, the cartel’s marijuana and poppy fields in Mexico cover more than 23,000 miles of land, an area larger than Costa Rica” (Woody, 2015). I tried to verify the claim and find that “El País” stated that “Guzmán oversees in Mexico cover around 60,000 kilometres of land” (De Llano, 2015)

Verifying the source, I found that the original quote came from an unnamed official: “Mr Guzmán bribed his way out of a federal prison in 2001. His territory now is 60,000 square km (23,000 square miles) of rugged mountains where “you’d need 100,000 soldiers surrounding the area and even then, I am not sure you’d succeed [in capturing him],” (The Economist, 2010). I contrasted the information provided by the local officer with official statistics (UNODC and Gobierno de la República, 2016, p.1) that stayed that between July 2014 and June 2015 Mexico the estimated poppy cultivation was 26,100 hectares.

I observe two possible explanations for such a statement, the first is that the officer who gave the statement was a local police with little knowledge of the Guzman’s territory; or second that the officer was referring to the territory of Sinaloa, that is 58,092 km<sup>2</sup> (INAFED, n.d., para.4), and how difficult it is to patrol. However, the relevant point here is the misinterpretation of the numbers. This is strictly related to the creation of articles and papers. People such as analysts, researcher or journalist have a duty to corroborate or verify the information. However, if the information has been published by The Economist, or an influential paper, the verification is less likely to happen.



Moreover, the information has been quoted several times in English and Spanish (see Quesada and Calderon, 2014; Beith, 2014, p. 17; El País, 2017; McGasko, 2019 and Ramirez, 2019). With such a variety of re-quotations in different languages, the verification becomes sometimes impossible because of this significant number of sources that state a "fact" or because of a language barrier. The researcher may not speak the languages and therefore, the verification occurs only in his/her language when the original mistake was made in another language, or when there are official documents that undermine the "fact" but they are in other languages. Another consideration is what society reads. There is little chance that the public will try to verify a source thoroughly. In the examples above mentioned, this can lead to a common misunderstanding that Mr Guzman drug empire is enormous, when in reality the information given in the article was mistaken and was not referring to the size of Mr Guzman's lands but the size of a Mexican state of Sinaloa.

This paradox of referencing is particularly important when analysing TOC, because the international nature of the phenomena means that in-depth analysis may be done in languages that are not English. This leads to the discovery that when researching TOC, the documents in English are not enough. Not only for the paradox of referencing, but also for the differences observed with the Italian documents and their translations to English. The omission of information can lead to completely different analysis, which would be correct according to the English literature provided, but that in fact would be wrong due to the de-facto omission in the official translations. In summary, this thesis showed the importance of reading documents in their original languages as a part of the good practices for TOC research.

### **7.9 Weaknesses observed during my research**

The idea of this research process began with an assumption that the Mexican DTOs were transnationalizing to Europe. My idea was based on what I observed while I was working in the Mexican government. However, this assumption turned out to be a weakness during my literature review because when I read the reports I observed that there were divergencies in the information presented. What is more, when I read the documents in Italian I realised that the information was different that that presented in the reports in English. In this regard, the weakness is that in exercise of collecting information and assessing the international power of a criminal organization, the researcher is limited by his or her language capacities. Another example of how language limitations are the Coca Cultivation Estimates published annually by the UNODC in Colombia. During the past years, the results are first published in Spanish and months later they are translated into English. This alters the analysis because those scholars who do not read Spanish will be dependent on the publication of the English translation.

I consider this important because it causes a de-facto limitation to the accuracy of the analysis because it is always behind in time. In this regard, one of the first weaknesses that I observed were my language limitations. This situation was particularly relevant for the Italian reports, because at the time in which I carried out my research, the reports were only in Italian. Hence I needed to learn Italian to understand the documents, which represented time and resources.

In a similar way, another weakness refers to the general knowledge of transnational criminal organizations. The SMEs observed how the exaggeration of the powers of a criminal organization can affect the international perception about it. One of my weaknesses at the beginning of the research was my lack of knowledge about other transnational criminal organizations. When I read information about the power and activities of the Mexican DTOs, I can observe and identify if the information is being exaggerated because I know the history, and the characteristics of the DTOs. However this is not the same with other criminal organizations. During my interviews with SMEs, many of them mentioned that their perception was that criminal groups from different countries were in charge of different aspects of drug trafficking in Europe. However, my capacity to comprehend the relevance of the role of other organizations is limited by the reduced knowledge that I have about them.

Another weakness of this research is the lack of a theoretical framework in International Relations to observe the behaviour of criminal organizations in the international level. The application of International Liberalism and Historical Institutionalism had the purpose of coping with the lack of an International Relations theory that considers the transnational criminal organizations as non-governmental actors of international relations. I consider that this represents a weakness because further theoretical developments would allow for better analysis of how the TOC groups affect the relations between states as well as their national and international security.

#### **7.10 Final thoughts**

Throughout this research project I could identify that there is not a clear expansion of the Mexican DTOs into Europe. Instead of confirming the supremacy of the Mexican DTOs in the cocaine routes to Europe as it was claimed by the DNA (2016), I observed that all groups were collaborating in a network that more effectively increased illegal activities. Thanks to the process I followed during my research I was able to identify and categorize endogenous and exogenous variables with the capacity of affect DTO behaviour both at the national and at the international level. What is more, this process made it possible to identify how the different critical junctures had long lasting effects in the empowerment of the Mexican DTOs.

I tested my hypothesis by observing SMEs perceptions about the international power of the Mexican DTOs. In this regard, I detected that there is a common idea that, because the Mexican DTOs are powerful players in the cocaine trafficking routes to the U.S., they could easily be players in the cocaine trafficking to Europe. In addition, the SMEs recognized that the counter narcotic strategies implemented by President Calderon in 2006, as well as the communication strategies of the counter narcotic policies, contributed to exaggerate the power of the Mexican DTOs. Hence, the idea that the Mexican DTOs are powerful players in the cocaine trafficking to Europe is related to the perception of the power that the cartels have in the Americas and in Mexico.

What is more, by researching the role that Mexican DTOs have in Europe, I discovered that the drug routes are not controlled by one main actor. It is a complex network in which many actors of different regions participate. Organised criminals from North,

Central and South America, West and Central Africa, and Eastern and Western Europe are involved in the constant illicit flow of cocaine to Europe. They collaborate seeking a maximization of profits. In this regards, the theory of International Liberalism can explain the behaviour of the criminal organizations at the international level. The organizations will collaborate with each other even when the gains are asymmetrical because not all the intermediaries get the same revenue, the actors decide to cooperate because coordinating activities help all the transnational illicit organizations to achieve their interests in terms of increasing the revenue.

In this regards, this research applied International Liberalism to observe the behaviour of the DTOs in the international level. At this point, there is an opportunity for further research too integrate Historical Institutionalism and International Liberalism and apply it to the study of transnational illicit groups. The exploration of new theoretical developments would help the understanding of TOC and at the same time it would update the theoretical approaches of the discipline of International Relations.

Similarly, there is further opportunity to explore the perception about the power of criminal organizations. The demonstration that the perception of the power of the cartels can influence the intelligence and analysis of one country could be a matter of further study. In this regards there is an opportunity to develop comparisons between the perceptions of different TOC groups and their real international power.

As a final conclusion, my research clarified that the Mexican DTOs are not playing a relevant role in the cocaine trafficking to Europe, and that the asseverations made by the Italian governments are a perception of what the Mexicans are doing. Furthermore, through the observation of the perception that the SMEs have about the Mexicans, it can be observed that there is a common acknowledgment that the Mexican DTOs play a powerful in the cocaine trafficking from Latin America to the United States. The observed power that the Mexican DTOs have in the Americas has contributed to generate the perception that the cartels could expand to Europe. What is more, the SMEs confirmed that the counter narcotic policies in Mexico plaid a role in the perception of the cartels as powerful international entities. In this regards, there was a n agreed opinion that the communication strategy of the counternarcotic efforts helped to exaggerate the power of the cartels.

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## **Appendixes**

### **Appendix 1: General questionnaire**

- 1) What is your experience in the counter-narcotic field?
- 2) Do you know what has been the counter-narcotic strategy of your country? Could you explain it?
- 3) Is the strategy in your country coordinated with European countries?
- 4) Is the strategy in your country coordinated with Latin American countries?
- 5) Could you explain what is the role of your security agency in this strategy?
- 6) Could you explain the evolution of the cocaine flow to Europe?
- 7) Could you explain the evolution of the cocaine flow from the Andean region?
- 8) The Italian government stated in a report that Mexican cartels are “on top of the pyramid” of the cocaine flow from Latin America to Europe, what do you think of this?
- 9) Do you know if the Mexicans are collaborating or controlling the cocaine flow? Could you explain?
- 10) In your experience, what had been the best and worst strategies that work to counter drug trafficking?
- 11) In your experience, how are drug trafficking organizations adapting to these strategies?
- 12) In your opinion, what would be the best strategies to counter transnational drug trafficking?

## **Appendix 2: Consent form and information sheet**

### **Interviews for PhD Project:**

#### **“A study of transnational drug trafficking organizations: the case of Mexican Drug Cartels”**

**by PhD Candidate Laura Diorella Islas Limiñana**

**Department of Politics, Languages and International Studies**

**University of Bath**

### **Consent Form**

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate as an interviewee in the PhD research project entitled “A study of transnational drug trafficking organizations: the case of Mexican Drug Cartels” conducted by Laura Diorella Islas Limiñana (the researcher).

Diorella Islas had discussed with me the subject of the research and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it, and have received answers that are satisfactory to me. I have read and kept a copy of the Information Sheet and understand the general purposes, risks and methods of this research.

I agree to take part because:

- 1) I know what I am expected to do as an interviewee and what this involves
- 2) The risks, inconvenience and discomfort of participating in the study had been explained to me.
- 3) All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction
- 4) I understand that the project may not be of direct benefit to me
- 5) I can withdraw from the study at any time
- 6) I am satisfied with the explanation given in relation to the project as it affects me and my consent is freely given.
- 7) I can obtain a summary of the results of the study when it is completed
- 8) I understand that my personal information will be kept private
- 9) I agree to the publication of the results of this study.

I understand and accept that the information given during the interview, including my answers, could be used and quoted for the purposes of this PhD research project.

I \_\_\_\_\_ (accept/ do not accept) that my name is mentioned as an interviewee in the research. In case that I do not accept, I understand that my name, as well as my personal information will be kept unpublished and they will be treated with the necessary regulations.

I \_\_\_\_\_ (give my permission/deny my permission) to the researcher to record the audio of this interview.

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Name and Signature of the Participant

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Date DD/MM/YY

**Interviews for PhD Project:**

**“A study of transnational drug trafficking organizations: the case of Mexican Drug Cartels”**

**by PhD Candidate Laura Diorella Islas Limiñana  
Department of Politics, Languages and International Studies  
University of Bath**

**Information Sheet**

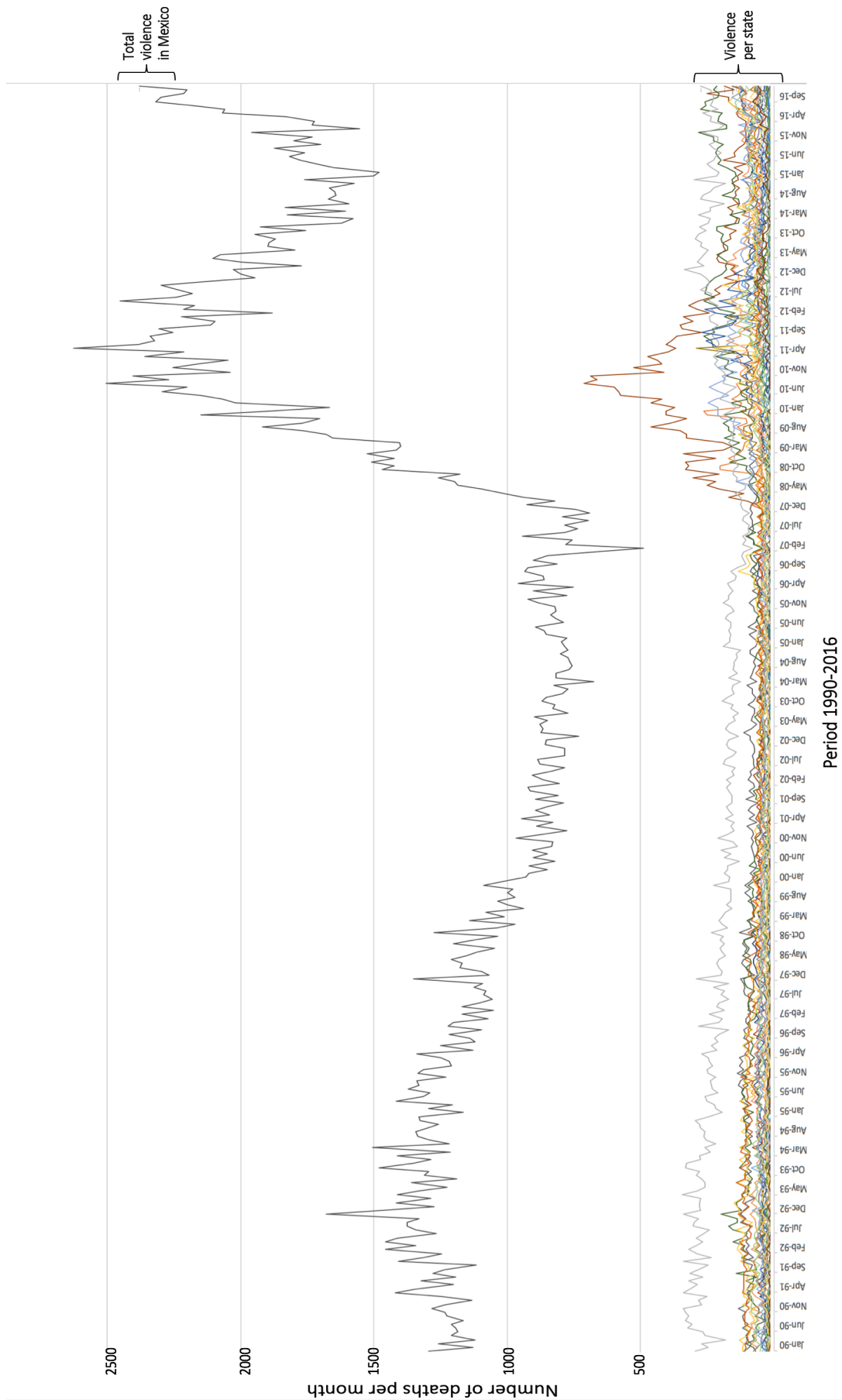
This research is a case study that focuses on transnational organized crime, particularly drug trafficking organizations (DTOs). Within this area, Latin American DTOs, with a highly adaptable, violent and territorial profile, represent a challenge not only to public security but to the stability of the region. Among these organizations, some of the most advanced groups are located in Mexico, where they have had the capacity of overcoming security policies at the same time they expand operations beyond Mexican borders, across the Atlantic and the Pacific sea. This research will explain the process of transnationalization of Mexican DTOs over time analysing this expansion in relation the specific conditions and security politics implemented by the governments in the Americas, particularly Mexico. Then it will analyse the extent of the expansion of the Mexican cartel's activities into Europe, and the development of cocaine routes in relation to the counter-narcotics measures implemented in the region. The relevance of this investigation is that by understanding how counter-narcotic policies impact the expansion of cartels into new horizons, it will be possible to create better policies that reduce their influence instead of pushing it forward.

The information obtained from the interviews will be used to analyse, deduce and clarify information about the behaviour of Mexican drug cartels and their equivalent groups in Europe with the objective of understanding the behavioural pattern of transnationalization in relation to national and international policies implemented in different countries, mainly in the Americas and Europe.





### Appendix 3 Homicides in Mexico January 1990- September 2016

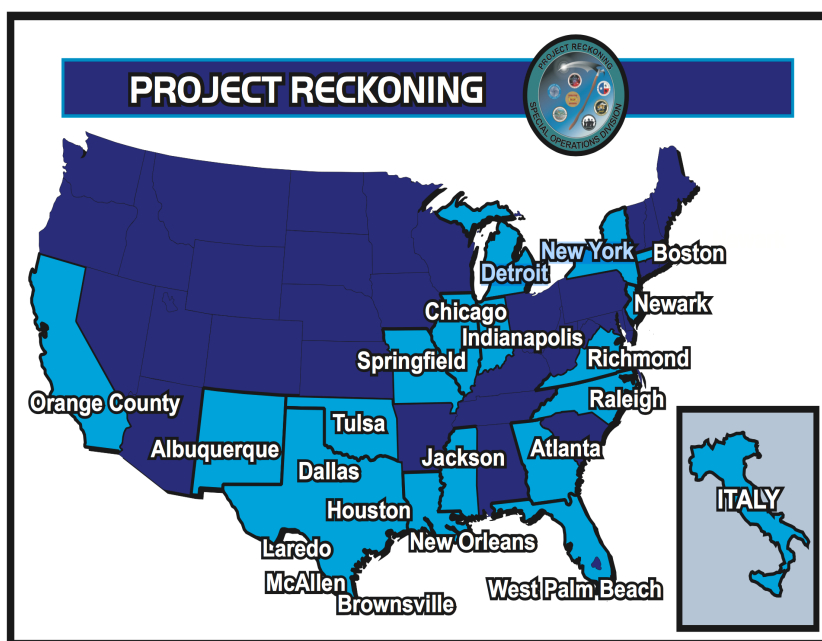


## Appendix 4 Operation Solare

The relevance of Operation Solare, also known as Operation Reckoning is that it is the evidence commonly used to prove that the Mexican Cartels are working with the Calabrian ‘Ndrangheta, as it was observed through the revision of the DIA the DNA and the DSCA reports (2008-2015). However, what the Italian documents and the newspapers do not describe the nature of the business partnership. Following that observation, it is essential to go back and understand the Operation, its scope and the discoveries that lead to assume a partnership between both groups.

On September 17, 2008, the U.S. authorities announced *Project Reckoning*. As explained by the U.S. authorities, it was “a multi-agency law enforcement effort led by DEA, that targeted the Mexican drug trafficking cartel known as the Gulf Cartel, which is responsible for transporting multi-ton quantities of cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin and marijuana from Colombia, Guatemala, Panama and Mexico to the U.S., as well as the distribution of those narcotics within the U.S” (DOJ-Southern District of New York, 2008, p.1) It included the collaboration between at least three countries: Italy, the U.S. and Mexico in order to carry on the investigation and the later detentions.

Figure 26 Map of operations carried out during Project Reckoning in the U.S.



Source: retrieved from DEA, 2008.

In the words of SME 16, the importance of this international operation was that it “uncovered the relationship between ‘Ndrangheta family based in New York areas and representatives of the Gulf cartels and that was the first time of the police were able to ensure a major relationship between the Ndrangheta and the Mexican cartels. The ‘Ndrangheta historically tend to have relationship with criminal organisation based in Colombia, in Peru, in Bolivia because they need to buy directly from them

the cocaine and not necessarily to deal with another organisation that practically has the same function that ‘Ndrangheta’ performs” ((*pers.comm.*) 26 June 2018).

In the US, the DEA announced the results of Project Reckoning in a press release in 2008 (DOJ- Southern District of New York, 2008, p.2), explaining that:

“Project Reckoning has resulted in the arrest of 507 individuals and the seizure of approximately \$60.1 million in U.S. currency, 16,711 kilograms of cocaine, 1,039 pounds of methamphetamine, 19 pounds of heroin, 51,258 pounds of marijuana, 176 vehicles and 167 weapons. Project Reckoning, a 15-month investigation, combined into one centrally coordinated effort several multi-district enforcement operations that all involved individuals with close ties to the Gulf Cartel. Operation Dos Equis, Operation Vertigo, Operation Stinger and Operation The Family as well as numerous local operations combined to form Project Reckoning.”

There were many counter narcotic operations that fell inside Project Reckoning, most of them were carried out mainly inside U.S. territory and not in the international scenario. To gather a better understanding of this operation, I created specific explanations for the major three operations of Project Reckoning. The relevance of these operations is that the criminals involved were part of a transnational criminal network trafficking drugs to Italy, and they are mentioned in the Italian documents as proof of the Mexican DTO involvement in Italy.

**a) Operation Dos Equis and Operation Vertigo (September 2018)** As stated in the official document from the DOJ-Northern District of Texas office, these operations were carried on in the DOJ-Northern District of Texas (2008). The objective of *Operation Dos Equis* was to investigate a Mexican group dedicated to the distribution of cocaine. The objective of *Operation Vertigo* targeted the distribution of crystal-methamphetamine. The outcome of both operations was “more than \$1 million in cash, approximately 300 kilograms of cocaine, approximately 400 pounds of methamphetamine, also known as “ice” or “crystal meth,” approximately 20 weapons and various explosive devices” (DOJ-Northern District of Texas, 2008, p.1). Additionally, the authorities arrested 22 drug traffickers whose cells were associated with the Gulf cartel in the United States.

**b) Operation Confluence (May 2008)** This operation tackled two illicit cells: a drug distribution cell in Atlanta, Georgia, and a transportation cell that sent the drug revenues from Atlanta to Mexico through Texas. During the arrests carried out on May 23, 2008, the authorities also found 7.65 million USD and 12 kilograms of cocaine (DEA Atlanta division, 2008). Mainly, this was a counternarcotic operation carried out in the U.S. without involvement from the Italian authorities.

### **Project Reckoning in Mexico (2008)**

The Mexican involvement in Project Reckoning was announced by the Office of the General Attorney. According to the press release, the investigation lead to the house arrest of Wenceslao Álvarez Álvarez, aka “Wencho” or “Wuenchis”, allegedly linked to the Gulf Cartel, responsible for the criminal organisation that trafficked drugs to the U.S., and whose

assets were seized in Operation Confluence in Atlanta. (PGR, 2008, p.2). He was arrested in 2008 by the Mexican authorities.

In 2010, Wenceslao was designated a Specially Designated Narcotics Traffickers by the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC, 2010), who denounced his involvement in the trafficking of cocaine to Atlanta. At the same time, the OFAC document detailed Álvarez activities, explaining that he had worked with the Gulf cartel as well as with another Mexican DTO known as Familia Michoacana. The relevance of this action is that the OFAC designations allow the authorities to freeze the person's assets, limiting their capacity to avoid the law. As part of the bilateral cooperation between Mexico and the U.S., he was extradited to the U.S. in 2017 (Castillo, C. 2017).

### **Project Reckoning in Italy: Operation Solare (September 2018)**

The part of Project Reckoning carried out in Italy was known under the name *Operation Solare*. It was carried out mainly in Calabria, and as stated in the DCSA "The investigation revealed that the clans located in the area of Reggio Calabria and along the Ionian coast formed strict alliances in order to finance huge imports of cocaine and, through connections in the USA, made agreements with the Mexican traffickers of the "Gulf Cartel" for the cocaine supply to Europe." (DCSAb, 2011, p.15) During the operation, the authorities in Calabria, Italy and New York, U.S. arrested 16 alleged members of the 'Ndrangheta (Nuova Concenza, 2008).

However, the DCSA does not present further specific information about the relationship between the Gulf Cartel and the 'Ndrangheta. About the role of the Mexican traffickers, Attorney of Reggio Calabria. In this regards, Rodriguez (2011, pp.230-231) explains that Operative Solare was relevant because the observed arrangement between the criminal groups changed the perception that Italian authorities had about the Mexican cartels. She also highlights that the subsequent cases of arrests of Mexicans trafficking cocaine were isolated cases without any relation to the discoveries made in Operation Solare. What is more, the Italian government continued to use this specific example as the proof of relationship between the Mexican and the Italian criminal groups (see DNA 2012 and 2013; DCSAb, 2011 and 2012; DIA 2015)